



The Open University

Social Psychology:  
Critical Perspectives on Self and Others

# DD307 Course Guide

Edited by Caroline Kelly on behalf  
of the DD307 course team



# Course Guide

## Social Psychology: Critical Perspectives on Self and Others

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First published 2007.

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Edited and designed by The Open University.

Typeset by The Open University

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by the Charlesworth Group, Wakefield

SUP 87483 7

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# Contents

<b>Part 1 Welcome to DD307</b>	<b>1</b>
1 How to use this <i>Course Guide</i>	1
2 Course components	1
3 Learning outcomes of the course	3
4 Skills development and critical analysis	4
5 The assessment strategy	5
<b>Part 2 Blocks and key themes</b>	<b>6</b>
1 Block 1, Introduction	6
1.1 An overview of course themes and perspectives	6
1.2 DVD 1	8
1.3 Book 1, 'Introduction'	8
1.4 Book 1, Chapter 1, 'Social psychology: past and present'	9
1.5 Book 1, Chapter 2, 'Methods and knowledge in social psychology'	11
1.6 Book 2, Chapter 1, 'Introduction'	13
1.7 Key concepts	13
1.8 Study skills pointers in Block 1	14
2 Block 2, Social selves	15
2.1 Book 1, Chapter 3, 'Families'	15
2.2 Book 1, Chapter 4, 'Emotion'	18
2.3 Book 1, Chapter 5, 'Self'	20
2.4 Book 2, Chapter 2, 'Close relationships'	22
2.5 Study skills pointers in Block 2	24
3 Block 3, Social judgement	24
3.1 Book 2, Chapter 3, 'Attitudes'	25
3.2 Book 2, Chapter 4, 'The fundamental attribution error'	27
3.3 Study skills pointers in Block 3	29
3.4 Using your review week	29
4 Block 4, The project proposal	32
4.1 DVD 2	32
5 Block 5, Group processes	32
5.1 Book 2, Chapter 5, 'Intragroup processes and entitativity'	34

5.2	Book 1, Chapter 6, 'Prejudice, conflict and conflict reduction'	36
5.3	Book 2, Chapter 6, 'Intergroup processes: social identity theory'	38
5.4	A final note on the Block 5 chapters	41
5.5	Study skills pointers in Block 5	42
6	Block 6, The project	42
7	Block 7, The production of knowledge	43
7.1	Book 2, Chapter 7, 'Bystander intervention'	44
7.2	Book 1, Chapter 7, 'Embodiment'	46
7.3	Book 2, Chapter 8, 'Individual differences'	49
7.4	Study skills pointers in Block 7	52
8	Block 8, Conclusions	53
8.1	Book 1, Chapter 8, 'Conclusion: social psychology matters'	53
8.2	Book 2, Chapter 9, 'Conclusion'	53
<b>Part 3 Revision and the DD307 exam</b>		<b>54</b>
1	General revision strategies	54
2	Revising DD307 course perspectives and themes	55
3	Other revision strategies on DD307	56
3.1	Topics and key concepts	56
3.2	Exploring dualisms	56
3.3	Posing questions	56
3.4	Using the DVDs and other course materials	57
4	Advice for tackling the exam	57
4.1	Before the exam	57
4.2	During the exam	58
5	A last word	61



# Part 1 Welcome to DD307

Welcome to DD307 *Social psychology: critical perspectives on self and others*. DD307 is a third-level, 60-point course that is one of a number of psychology courses offered by The Open University. DD307 will help you to develop a critical understanding of contemporary theory and research in the exciting field of social psychology. It will also guide you in developing your skills as an independent learner, thinker, researcher and writer.

We hope that you will find the course challenging, inspiring, enjoyable and thought-provoking.

## 1 How to use this Course Guide

In starting any course, it is important to have an overview of its intellectual aims and content, the different components and materials that you will be studying, and what will be required in the assessment. This *Course Guide* is important for gaining such an overview.

The course is divided into eight blocks of material. Part 2 of this *Course Guide* takes you through the blocks, provides brief summaries of the chapters, and highlights the course themes, study skills pointers and key concepts in each block. The activities for each block will also be useful preparation for the assessed work.

You should read the *Course Guide* at the beginning of each block of material so that you know what is expected of you at each point of the course, and to find suggestions on how to approach your work.

Part 3 of this *Course Guide* is devoted to reviewing and integrating what you have learned in the course. It highlights key themes and issues that will be useful when you come to preparing for the end of course exam, and provides some tips for revision and exams.

## 2 Course components

The course components are listed below:

- *Course Guide*: remember to read the relevant section before you start each block of material.
- Two course texts: Book 1, *Social Psychology Matters* and Book 2, *Critical Readings in Social Psychology*. Book 1 takes you through a number of selected topics in social psychology, some of which have a long history in the discipline, and others that are more recent areas of interest. Book 2 covers some of the core subject areas in social psychology (as stipulated



by the British Psychological Society) and introduces you to some original readings, combining excerpts from previously published material with supporting commentaries.

- Two DVDs: the first of these introduces you to the main themes and perspectives in the course; the second focuses on the research process that is particularly relevant for your project work.
- *Project Booklet*: this will guide you through the process of conducting your own independent project.
- *Study Calendar*: this provides you with a 'map' of the course materials, the sequence in which they are used, and the key dates by which your assignments must be submitted to your tutor. It may be a good idea to write down the assignment cut-off dates in your diary now.
- *Assignment Booklet*: throughout the year, you will need to refer to this booklet containing the tutor-marked assignments (TMAs). In this booklet you will find details of the assignments you will be writing. Do take particular note of how many assignments you must submit, which of these cannot be substituted, and how each assignment is weighted. The booklet gives useful hints and tips on essay writing skills and provides an essential guide to referencing. Read these sections carefully before you embark on your first assignment.
- Course website: this is a website for students registered on the course. It contains links to additional materials and other Open University sites, such as the library. It will also be updated over the year to provide additional information such as Stop Press announcements and the date of the final exam. Make sure that you have a look at the website at the start of the course.
- Use of libraries: you will have the opportunity to make use of the online library resources available at The Open University (<http://library.open.ac.uk>). This will be particularly important when you come to work on your own project.

As DD307 is a third-level course, we are not offering you study guidance on a week-by-week basis. Instead, we encourage you to plan your own workload, taking account of the tasks that need to be completed by a particular date. People study in different ways and may choose slightly different routes through the material. There is a suggested order for the reading but you are free to vary this if you choose.

Although there is no formal requirement that you attend tutorials and day schools, we strongly recommend that you try to do so since these forms of support are a valuable and integral part of studying an Open University course. We also encourage you to form self-help groups – face to face if geography permits, or via telephone or email if not. You may be able to establish such a group with people you meet if you attend tutorials and day schools. However, if this is not possible, do ask your tutor to link you up with other students. Other students are a source of moral and practical support, and



they will find different areas of the course easy or difficult. Thus, mutual sharing of understanding will help everyone at some stage.

Remember, too, that your tutor is not the only Open University person who is there to support you. If you need any advice on study skills, personal issues affecting your studies, or careers advice, your regional centre has a team of dedicated advisers who can answer questions you may have about studying with The Open University.

### 3 Learning outcomes of the course

The structure and assessment strategy of DD307 have been designed to help you move successfully into the position of an independent and resourceful learner. At third level, this involves the development of analytical research and study skills. In addition, Book 2 provides experience of reading different kinds of academic texts, including journal articles.

The learning outcomes of the course and its assessment can be divided into the sets of skills outlined below. You should anticipate being able to demonstrate these by the end of the course.

- **Knowledge and understanding of:**

- key contemporary theoretical approaches and debates to understanding selves and others in the social world
- the social and historical context within which contemporary social psychological research is conducted
- the contested nature of forms of knowledge in social psychology and the potential uncertainties, ambiguities and limits of knowledge
- the issues involved in conducting research in social psychology, including ethical issues and research design
- three contemporary qualitative research methodologies in social psychology.

- **Cognitive skills: the ability to**

- organise, select, evaluate and present arguments and evidence logically
- synthesise and critically evaluate information and arguments from different sources and media
- compare, contrast and critically evaluate different theoretical perspectives and use one perspective to critique alternatives
- compare, contrast and critically evaluate different forms of research evidence
- apply course ideas and approaches to understanding everyday situations.

- **Practical and/or professional skills: the ability to**

- read, digest and synthesise material from a range of sources
- produce writing that makes use of a range of sources and is appropriately referenced
- independently find and review appropriate literature
- develop a research proposal that is derived from existing literature with due consideration to practical and ethical issues
- conduct and write up clearly and concisely an independent research study on a selected topic in social psychology



- reflect on your role as a researcher and on how your own biases have affected the way in which you conducted the research, the topic chosen, and the interpretations of the data.

■ **Key skills: the ability to**

- communicate effectively in writing using appropriate academic conventions
- read and interpret different multimedia materials
- demonstrate skills of critical analysis
- reference sources in an appropriate manner
- participate effectively and sensitively in discussions
- use the internet as a means of communication and as a source of information.

■ **Independent study skills: the ability to**

- improve your own learning, particularly the ability to learn from feedback and advice
- work to an agreed timetable and meet deadlines
- identify and work towards targets for personal, academic or career development
- develop an adaptable and flexible approach to study and work
- identify and use different sources of support.

## 4 Skills development and critical analysis

We assume that you have already developed a range of academic study skills from your previous studies such as active reading strategies, note-taking, writing in your own words, referencing, and work planning. Skills of critical thinking and analysis will also have been relevant to your earlier studies, and you may have had feedback from tutors suggesting that you need to be 'less descriptive and more analytical'. At third level, this is a very important skill.

### **Do you feel confident that you know what is meant by 'critical thinking and analysis'?**

Some important aspects of critical thinking and analysis are as follows:

- Analysis involves unpacking an issue, proposition or claim and breaking it down into its different elements or components. This may entail identifying the logical stages or series of points in an argument and distinguishing between propositions that are simply asserted and those that are argued on the basis of evidence.
- Analysis includes identifying the examples and evidence being used in order to clarify and support an argument, and noting whether the author is relying on ideas and evidence from other authors.
- Critical thinking means asking questions about how terms are being defined, looking at the assumptions made, and identifying the key concepts and theoretical perspectives used. The most useful questions to ask are usually: what? how? and why?



These points mean that you should start your own writing by analysing the task set, or the question, and by thinking about it critically. Unpack the proposition or task into its different elements by asking: What is meant by this term? What are the assumptions underlying this approach?

The material in DD307 has been chosen to try to help you to develop this skill and to appreciate how different theoretical perspectives can be put to work for effective critical analysis.

## 5 The assessment strategy

Your work on DD307 will be assessed through six TMAs, including one double-weighted assignment (TMA 05) in which you will be expected to conduct a small piece of independent research, building on a detailed proposal that is submitted as TMA 03. Your tutor will give you feedback on your proposal, which will help you to develop your project. These assignments comprise the continuous assessment component of the course that makes up 50 per cent of your total final grade. The other 50 per cent of your total course grade derives from a three-hour unseen end of course exam.

It is very important for you to attempt *all* the assignments as you work through the course. They have been carefully constructed to develop a series of skills as the course progresses, and to allow you to receive feedback from your tutor on your understanding of the material and your ability to use it effectively in your writing. If you have difficulties, contact your tutor for help or advice and remember to negotiate any deadline extensions that you may need in advance. In order to allow for the unexpected crisis, there is a substitution rule that allows the lowest mark from TMAs 01, 02 and 04 to be replaced by a substitution score. However, remember that any marks you get for an assignment will contribute to your final mark by increasing that substitution score. Only in the most exceptional circumstances, following discussion with your tutor, should you miss an assignment completely.

You have now completed the overview of the course components and assessment strategy. We hope that you will find this *Course Guide* useful as you progress through the course, and that you will enjoy studying social psychology. You should now watch DVD 1, which will introduce Block 1.

## Part 2 Blocks and key themes

### 1 Block 1, Introduction

Block 1 covers Study Weeks 0 to 3 and includes the completion of TMA 01. We would recommend that you start your study of DD307 by watching DVD 1. *It will be most helpful if, on first viewing, you watch the different sections of the DVD in the order in which they appear on the on-screen menu.* You should also read:

- Book 1, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2
- Book 2, Chapter 1.

It will be useful to return to the introductory chapters as you work through the course. They provide an outline of the structure and rationale of the course, and identify themes, perspectives and methodologies.

#### 1.1 An overview of course themes and perspectives

DD307 has two sets of structuring devices that you will find running throughout the course. It is very important that you are clear about the differences between these two sets.

The first set, *interrogative themes*, aims to give you some critical concepts with which to think about the subject matter of social psychology. They are so called because they can be used to question (or 'interrogate') the values that permeate social psychology, values that otherwise might not get noticed and yet have effects that matter. The themes are:

- power relations
- situated knowledges
- individual–society dualism
- agency–structure dualism.

You will find these described in Chapter 1 of Book 1 (see also Section 1.4 below). The aim of using these four themes is to help you to step back from the immediate substance of the social psychological topics presented and to think about the wider context in which research is produced.

The second set of structuring devices comprises four *perspectives* that are described in Chapter 2 of Book 1. These represent different ways of doing social psychology and are:

- cognitive social
- social psychoanalytic.
- discursive psychological
- phenomenological



The latter three of these perspectives involve contemporary qualitative methodologies that have challenged the dominant scientific approach, represented here by cognitive social psychology. You should be aware, however, that there are many different ways to divide up and label different perspectives in social psychology (as in any academic discipline). Each of the perspectives that we have chosen to feature in this course contains within it a variety of approaches, and we use the four labels above as broad structuring devices for approaching selected topics in social psychology.

Each chapter of Book 1 takes two of the four perspectives and applies them to a topic in social psychology such as 'self' or 'families'. This allows you to see how researchers working from different perspectives have approached the same topic and how the adopted perspective crucially affects the knowledge produced.

As you work through the course material, try to keep these two sets of structuring devices in your mind, and you may find it helpful to make notes relating to these themes and perspectives as you go along.

### A note on terminology

Terminology can never be pinned down, and it is always on the move as ideas are contested and change. This applies to the labels that we use for our four perspectives. One consequence of incorporating a variety of different academic voices in the course is that there may be some variation in terminology used. We have not changed the terms that original authors have used when we are discussing their work. When you encounter some of these differences, don't worry, just go with the flow of the meaning and argument. Our labels try to be generic, yet recognise that there are numerous distinctions in the concepts used. By the end of the course, you may have begun to appreciate these distinctions.

Here is an example of four different, interrelated concepts belonging to the social psychoanalytic perspective, illustrating their commonalities and distinctions. 'Social psychoanalytic' is our perspective label, but there are three other concepts that crop up frequently: psychoanalytic, psychodynamic and psychosocial.

*Social psychoanalytic* is a perspective on qualitative social psychological research. It indicates that it is informed by psychoanalytic ideas but also by social approaches to the analysis of data. Sometimes in the wider literature, the term *psychosocial* is used to refer to this (as it often is in our own published work). None the less, 'psychosocial' is so often used to describe a research approach that does *not* draw on psychoanalytic ideas (e.g. in health and social care research) that we decided on our more specific label – 'social psychoanalytic'. *Psychoanalysis* is a specific body of theory drawing directly on the clinical practice of psychoanalysis. Our approach to understanding individuals' inner and outer worlds is informed by psychoanalysis. The label *psychodynamic* emphasises that psychological processes are constantly fluid and in motion: dynamic. All psychoanalysis is based on the principle of dynamic mental life but so are many other (non psychoanalytic) psychotherapies. These approaches do not necessarily emphasise how people are situated and formed socially.



## 1.2 DVD 1

DVD 1 is organised in a number of different sections that will introduce you to the main themes and perspectives in the course. We advise you to view the sections, initially at least, in the order that you are led through them by the on-screen menu. This will help you to make the most of the material. On subsequent viewings it is likely that you will want to choose particular sections to watch or to watch sections in a different order.

Following a short opening, the section entitled *Interrogating Knowledge* leads you to several sub-sections that focus on the interrogative themes and illustrate in different ways how these themes can be applied in the context of social psychological research. In *Production of Knowledge* you will see excerpts from Philip Zimbardo's famous 'Stanford Prison experiment' and a follow-up study, 'The experiment', conducted more recently by Stephen Reicher and Alex Haslam. The material has been selected to give you a flavour of some of the lively contemporary debates in the discipline. In *Interrogative Themes*, Wendy Hollway, Ann Phoenix and Wendy Stainton-Rogers address each of the course themes in more depth to give you a fuller understanding of their usefulness as a tool with which to think about and critically analyse social psychology's areas of study, its theory and methods. You then revisit *Production of Knowledge* and watch it in the light of the interrogative themes.

In the next section of the DVD, *Perspectives*, you are introduced to the four perspectives by social psychologists who will discuss their research: cognitive social (Alex Haslam), discursive psychological (Bianca Raabe), phenomenological (Darren Langdrige) and social psychoanalytic (Helen Lucey). At the end of this DVD you will find the section *Definitions*, which contains summaries of key points about each of the perspectives.

## 1.3 Book 1, 'Introduction'

### What will I learn from the Introduction?

The Introduction gives you an overview of Book 1. It begins by explaining that there are many different varieties of social psychology and that these reflect different views on what it means to be a person and on how social psychological knowledge is best produced. The chapters in Book 1 present research on contemporary social psychological issues and they also introduce various theoretical perspectives that inform social psychology. An important focus throughout the book is an appreciation of the historical context within which social psychology has developed. This introductory chapter spells out the themes underlying the book and provides brief summaries of each of the following chapters.



## 1.4 Book 1, Chapter 1, 'Social psychology: past and present'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

This chapter provides a historical account of the development of social psychology and its methodologies. The chapter begins by pointing out that, in order to study the history of the discipline, we need to be clear as to what exactly social psychology is. There are different views on this question, even a view that there are different social psychologies, but some generalisation is possible.

**Think about your own expectations about social psychology at this point. What sort of subject do you think social psychology is and how do you think it relates to other disciplines such as psychology and sociology? What sorts of topics do you think social psychologists study and how do they go about doing their research?**

Wendy Hollway traces the roots of social psychology to a number of early influences, in particular to experimental psychological studies conducted in laboratories. Many social psychologists were keen to embed the emerging discipline within a scientific approach, using scientific methods, in the hope that a body of scientific principles about human social behaviour could be developed that would be as secure as those principles developed in the physical sciences. They hoped that, over time, a body of knowledge could be developed that would enable progress in our understanding of human social behaviour.

**Think for a moment about what it means to say that social psychology is a science. How does 'science' differ from 'commonsense'? What does this imply about the theories and methods adopted by social psychologists?**

This emerging social psychology (*psychological social psychology* – PSP) aspired to scientific status, which brought with it both an adherence to mainly experimental, quantitative methods and a focus on the individual as its unit of analysis. According to this approach, it is within the individual that the information processing mechanisms and consciousness reside that allow us to tease out cause and effect in human behaviour. Here, social psychologists are interested in *explaining* social behaviour – *why* did someone behave in a particular way? Can we recreate the essential elements of this situation so that we can tease out the major influences on behaviour?

Nevertheless, this type of social psychology, which emerged from its parent discipline of experimental psychology, was not the only variety. Hollway describes how other sociological and philosophical influences produced another type of social psychology (*sociological social psychology* – SSP) that was more concerned to study the relationship between the individual and society using naturalistic methods such as observation in social settings.

The relationship between these two types of social psychology is not straightforward, and there are a number of overlapping and intersecting



influences. Hollway refers to geographical, disciplinary and methodological factors in this discussion.

An important consideration in the present course is how social psychology can avoid being either a branch of psychology or a branch of sociology and instead carve out a distinctive interdisciplinary space that is both social *and* psychological.

**What do you think such an approach would look like? How would it be possible to combine social and psychological processes in studying human behaviour, and how can we develop methods that capture both of these domains?**

Hollway suggests that social psychology in the UK is currently clearly divided into two camps: one that adopts the dominant scientific – and usually experimental – approach; and the other which represents a more ‘critical’ social psychology, with an emphasis on the study of language and meaning, mainly using qualitative methods in everyday social settings.

This latter approach has become particularly strong in the UK thanks to a number of influences. One important influence has been the development of *discourse analysis* or *discursive psychology*. This approach encouraged social psychologists to move away from the study of the individual and towards the study of language and meanings. According to this approach, meanings do not reside in the minds of individuals but are located in the social world, and the study of meanings therefore requires quite a different methodological approach.

**What are the implications for social psychology of shifting attention away from the individual and towards language and meaning in everyday settings? For example, how might the role of the researcher be affected by this new focus?**

Hollway considers other important influences on the development of a more recent ‘critical’ social psychology. These include the development of a feminist social psychology that has strengthened theorising around power relations and inequalities, the role of meanings and experiences, and the role of relationships in the study of the self. All of these influences have led to a move away from an emphasis on the person as an autonomous self-contained individual, and towards an emphasis on the person as situated in a particular historical and social context imbued with social meanings.

Finally, this leads Hollway, in Section 4, to set out the *four interrogative themes* that underlie DD307. These themes help with understanding particular topics in social psychology and also with understanding how the discipline itself has developed and produced a particular kind of knowledge.

- The question of *power relations* within research has many dimensions. It includes the relationship between the researcher and the researched, the power of the researcher to design and manipulate the research setting and to interpret the data for future generations. It also points to the fact that only some questions are asked and investigated, while others remain invisible, and this has consequences in terms of who is advantaged and disadvantaged by social psychological knowledge.



- Social psychological knowledge is itself produced within particular contexts. Methods used will inevitably influence the kind of knowledge that is produced and, in order to acknowledge this, it is important to take into account the cultural and historical context of research findings. The term *situated knowledges* captures the idea that knowledge is inevitably a function of the situation in which it is produced.
- The theme of whether individual or society is privileged in the explanation of social psychological phenomena is referred to as *individual–society dualism*. In some places in the course material, you may find this referred to as ‘individual–social dualism’. Is it possible to develop genuine social psychological theories that embrace these two domains and transcend this dualism?
- The theme of *agency–structure* clearly relates to individual–society dualism. Do individuals exercise intentional choice (agency)? Or are they constrained and more or less shaped by the powerful influence of individual characteristics and/or social situations?

These themes run throughout the course and we will use this *Course Guide* to highlight some of the areas where they are most apparent.

## 1.5 Book 1, Chapter 2, ‘Methods and knowledge in social psychology’

### What will I learn from this chapter?

This chapter introduces social psychology’s methodological debates and disagreements. It explains why no single social psychological method is sufficient, and demonstrates that methods produce knowledge, i.e. they do not just reveal knowledge that is already there; rather, they play an active role in how social psychological phenomena are constructed and understood.

The chapter introduces four perspectives or ways of doing social psychology. These are cognitive social, discursive psychological, phenomenological and social psychoanalytic. As mentioned previously, there are many ways that one could choose to divide up and label perspectives within social psychology. Within each perspective chosen and labelled here, there are many varieties of approach. However, it may help at this stage of the course to focus on those features that are broadly shared by researchers working within each of the four course perspectives. Each of the perspectives is associated first with a particular view on how the object of social psychology is understood, a theory of being, or ontology; second, with a particular approach to researching this object, or methodology; and third, with particular methods that follow from the previous two considerations.

### Four perspectives in social psychology

To illustrate, in Section 2.1 four social psychologists, each a specialist in one of the perspectives, have put the perspectives to work on the same example, a study of emotions using a newspaper headline extracted from a journalist’s



interview with an Iraqi family. This illustrates how the various perspectives produce different kinds of knowledge on the same topic.

- Russell Spears emphasises the advantages of exploring causal relations using the control provided by the experimental method, which is an important method in cognitive social psychology.
- Wendy Hollway emphasises the importance of her own subjective response as a social psychoanalytic researcher to the issue at stake, and the need to take account of participants' inner affective worlds in making sense of phenomena.
- Derek Edwards argues, conversely, that social psychologists should not be pursuing deep underlying sources of significance, but using discourse analysis to study how specific words, descriptions and accounts are assembled and put to work in specific contexts.
- Finally, Darren Langdridge emphasises the importance of foregrounding the detailed description of personal experience in the phenomenological approach.

In Section 2.2, Wendy Hollway provides a table (Table 2.1) that compares the four perspectives along a number of different dimensions. This highlights some of the similarities and differences in approach and emphasis. Section 2.2 of Hollway's chapter also focuses on some interesting points of comparison between the perspectives.

**At this point, you may like to think about a topic in social psychology that interests you. You might, for example, like to think about friendship, helping behaviour, prejudice or aggression. How would psychologists working within each of the four perspectives approach the study of that topic? What sort of data would be collected?**

The chapter points out that the experimental method dominated social psychology for most of the twentieth century. This is explored further through an account of Stanley Milgram's well-known experiment on 'obedience', in which experimental 'subjects' supposedly administered electric shocks to people who were in fact accomplices of the experimenter. Hollway uses this study to illustrate two interrogative themes: power relations and situated knowledges.

Hollway goes on to discuss growth in the social psychology of attitude research, and the attempt to develop 'scientific' approaches to the measurement of individual attitudes. This, she suggests, is an example of how a method can produce a limited and distorted vision of human behaviour and experience. Hollway argues for the need to move instead towards the study of meanings and experience in understanding human behaviour which, she argues, are best studied with qualitative methods.

**Do you think that the four perspectives described in this chapter can be seen as complementing each other or are there some areas where they are in conflict?**

**In Chapters 1 and 2 of Book 1, Hollway has presented a strong narrative of the development of social psychology and the approaches**



**and methods that characterise the discipline today. Do you agree with the arguments made in these chapters? Can you think of any alternative ways of constructing the development of social psychology and the different approaches that make up the discipline?**

## 1.6 Book 2, Chapter 1, 'Introduction'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

This chapter provides you with an overview of Book 2. Stephanie Taylor begins by discussing the main features of a 'critical' social psychology, which include an emphasis on the socially situated nature of research findings and a concern with illuminating power relations. You will see that the boundaries between 'mainstream' and 'critical' social psychology are not always clear-cut! The book aims to introduce you to the complexities of the contemporary academic field and to the range of voices that contribute to the debate. The rest of this introductory chapter comprises summaries of each of the central chapters of the book.

Each chapter covers a different topic in social psychology by presenting one or two 'classic' readings followed by an alternative approach. Chapters are structured by introductory ('Introduction') and linking ('Commentary') texts that highlight the key epistemological and methodological issues raised by the readings.

## 1.7 Key concepts

Some key concepts from this block are listed for you below, and you should think about how to use these in your study of DD307. You might like to use index cards to add further concepts as you work through the course.

Alternatively, you may want to develop your own concept store on your computer – begin with a definition in your own words, add page references, the names of key authors, update your concept store throughout the year, and at the end of the year you will have a valuable tool for revision and consolidation. We have not provided a ready-made glossary since the terms used may take on slightly different meanings in different contexts of use. We would recommend that you look up the key concepts in the indexes to the books to see how the concepts are being used in various different places.

### Key concepts

critical social psychology	methods	social psychometrics
discourse analysis	methodology	subjectivity
epistemology	ontology	symbolic interactionism
generalisability	psychological social psychology (PSP)–sociological social psychology (SSP)	



## 1.8 Study skills pointers in Block 1

### Time management

At the beginning of the course, you will need to think carefully about time management. You will have three weeks to watch DVD 1 and to complete the introductory reading. It will be helpful to look ahead to the TMA questions, particularly TMA 01 which will come at the end of this block.

### Note-taking

You will need to work on your note-taking skills. As you work through these chapters, note down the main points concerning the question of 'What is social psychology?' and 'What have been the main influences on its development?' In Chapter 1 of Book 1, pay particular attention to the interrogative themes – it is important that you have a good understanding of these themes as you read the chapters that follow. See if you can summarise each theme. It would be useful to begin a file in which you keep notes relating to each theme with examples from the various chapters as you go along. This will help you to build up your knowledge about each of the themes, and it will be a very useful revision aid when you reach the end of the course.

### Using the table in Book 1, Chapter 2

In Book 1, Chapter 2, make sure that you have a clear understanding of the main similarities and differences between the four perspectives. Use Table 2.1 in Section 2 to help with this. Note down the page numbers of particularly relevant material that may be useful when you come to writing your TMAs. Again, you may wish to begin a file in which you keep notes relating to each of the four perspectives as you work through the course.

### Working with the DVD

You will also need to take notes from DVD 1.

- *Production of Knowledge*: Note down the main points that you took from the extracts of the two 'prison' studies and also think how you felt when you watched these extracts.
- *Interrogative Themes*: During the discussion with Wendy Hollway, Ann Phoenix and Wendy Stainton-Rogers, make notes on the interrogative themes (power relations, situated knowledges, individual–society dualism and agency–structure dualism).
- *Production of Knowledge Revisited*: The extracts from these 'prison' studies are used to illustrate the interrogative themes. Think about how the material could be used to illustrate each theme, and write notes about each one.
- *Perspectives*: Make notes on each of the four perspectives and the research that is used on the DVD to illustrate each perspective (cognitive social psychology, discursive psychology, phenomenological psychology, social



psychoanalytic psychology). Think about your first reactions to these perspectives. This will help you when you come to write TMA 01.

- *Definitions:* The final part of DVD 1 summarises some key points relating to each perspective's view of ontology, epistemology, method and unit of analysis. Note that although the reference on the board refers to 'unit of analysis', 'focus of analysis' is also used by different perspective commentators. The two terms can be understood to be interchangeable but emphasising different meanings, with 'unit' being more in line with a cognitive social emphasis on variables, while 'focus' is a broader way of viewing the object of study and is therefore more appropriate for the other three perspectives. You may find it helpful to return to this section later on in the course when you have covered more of the course material. It provides a quick reminder of key points.

## 2 Block 2, Social selves

Block 2 covers Study Weeks 4 to 8 and includes the completion of TMA 02.

You should read:

- Book 1, Chapters 3, 4 and 5
- Book 2, Chapter 2.

Block 2 begins your study of a number of key topics in social psychology. The topics that are covered here have been chosen to illustrate aspects of our social selves. The research which is described demonstrates that from the very beginning of our lives, even our most personal and emotional experience reflects the surrounding social context. Each chapter takes two theoretical perspectives (cognitive social, discursive psychological, phenomenological or social psychoanalytic) and uses these two perspectives to discuss the topic. In your reading of these chapters, you will begin to appreciate the very different ways in which social psychologists can approach a topic.

### 2.1 Book 1, Chapter 3, 'Families'

#### What will I learn from this chapter?

This chapter considers some of the tensions between self and other, individual and society. These tensions are part of a more general distinction between PSP and SSP.

#### Do you recall the main differences between PSP and SSP approaches?

Helen Lucey argues that a meaningful study of individuals in families also includes a consideration of social, cultural and structural influences. The chapter begins by querying the definition of a 'family', showing how family forms and practices have changed over the past fifty years, and critically



evaluating the assumption that there is, or has ever been, one dominant or ideal form of family.

**Do you agree that contemporary family forms and practices are still judged against a cultural ideal of the heterosexual nuclear family?**

The chapter goes on to outline two theoretical perspectives (and related methodological approaches), namely discursive psychological and social psychoanalytic, applying them to the study of family-related topics, in particular, 'singleness', housework, and sibling relations.

**Look again at Table 2.1 in Book 1, Chapter 2. Can you identify the main differences between these two theoretical perspectives? How do you think they are applied in Chapter 3?**

The discursive psychological perspective asks what kinds of cultural representations and identities are commonly available in discourse, how they are taken up in practice, and how this reproduces inequalities in family life. The social psychoanalytic perspective also assumes that psychological and social lives are interlinked, but argues that conscious rational thought is only the tip of the iceberg. From this perspective, psychologists are interested in how the social world influences what individuals take in (introject) at an unconscious level, and how the unconscious mind influences what individuals feel and what they say and do. Ethnicity, community, class, gender and social relationships (such as sibling relations) all have an impact on these unconscious dynamics. Do you recall how Lucey illustrates this point through her analysis of how the Asian sisters talk about their eldest sister?

**You might like to go back to DVD 1 at this point and watch again the section on the social psychoanalytic perspective where Lucey discusses her research.**

**From the examples in this chapter, what do you think are the differences between the discursive psychological and social psychoanalytic perspectives in terms of how they approach the influence of the social world?**

Both perspectives see social reality as constructed in everyday discourse, and they are both interested in how 'subject positions' are taken up by individuals as locations in conversation. They are both concerned with the influence of dominant cultural ideas. Yet while the discursive psychological approach is interested in *what* people say, *what* discourse resources they draw on, and how they use them, the social psychoanalytic perspective goes further and explains *why* people say what they do. Why do people take up certain subject positions and what is their 'unconscious emotional investment'? Researchers are also interested in what is *not* said and what is *hidden* through the operation of defence mechanisms.

### **Examples of course themes**

The discussions in this chapter clearly relate to at least two of the course themes: individual–society dualism and power relations.



**Lucey argues that previous approaches to the family have either kept the individual and the social (or society) as separate areas of study or they have reduced the social elements to the study of interpersonal processes within the family. How do the two perspectives in this chapter go beyond this in linking together the individual and the social?**

Both the discursive psychology and the social psychoanalytic perspectives situate the family within the wider societal context of social and cultural influence. A relationship between the private realm of the family and the public realm of structures, processes and discourses is assumed by both of these perspectives, but they explain these links in different ways. While discursive psychology focuses on how individuals are the product and the producers of discourses, a social psychoanalytic perspective stresses the mutual influence of internal and external worlds.

Discursive psychology claims that individuals can use existing discourse in a variety of ways, as a form of social action. However, choice is restricted by what is available to individuals through the commonsense ideas of culture. For example, a single woman can actively construct her identity in a positive way, using culturally available ideas about independence and personal achievement. Nevertheless, she does so against a cultural background that also privileges couples or nuclear families as 'ideal' and 'normal'. Although the individual is able to actively draw on discourse to construct herself, she is still to some extent 'spoken by' those discourses that circulate in culture. Thus, the individual and the social are inextricably linked through discourse.

The social psychoanalytic perspective stresses the inseparable nature of inner psychological and social life. In families, siblings (as well as parents) are said to have an important impact on the emergence of the individual's subjectivity because they are part of what is introjected (taken into the self). Older siblings can become part of the 'critical internal voice' that individuals use to self-regulate their own impulses and desires. These influences, and the social world of community, ethics and culture, create a set of moral codes that is introjected by the individual and affects the way they think and feel.

In Lucey's example of the Asian sisters, notice how the process of 'splitting' good from bad is manifest in the 'idealisation' of the eldest sister as 'pure' and 'good'. This suggests that the unconscious inner world, as well as social structures and culture, has an effect on family relationships and identities.

**What do the two perspectives in this chapter say about power relations?**

Discursive psychology points out how power and ideology work through culturally accepted discourses and social practices that privilege some categories of people at the expense of others. One example given in the chapter is the gendered responsibility for housework; another is how 'singleness' is evaluated against the normative 'ideal' of being in a relationship.

According to the social psychoanalytic perspective, individual subjectivities are unconsciously formed in relation to interpersonal relations in the family (e.g. siblings) and also through the structural constraints of wider social



codes, cultures and traditions. Culture and traditions are promoted by parents and siblings, and introjected by children in the context of family life. Note how relationships among siblings and their effects on the formation of individual and group subjectivities within the family, referred to by Lucey in Section 4.4, are influenced by the power of unconscious thoughts, desires and imaginings.

### Key concepts

ego	intersubjectivity	splitting
ego-ideals	introjection	subject positions
id	investment	superego
ideological dilemmas	projection	unconscious desire
interpretative repertoires	projective identification	unconscious processes

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## 2.2 Book 1, Chapter 4, 'Emotion'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

The chapter reviews psychological theories of emotion, describing the progression from William James's emphasis on embodiment, to a shift towards a more social understanding of emotion in Stanley Schachter's two-factor theory of emotion. According to this latter approach, we infer emotion from the current situation and from how other people are reacting to it. This paved the way for a more social account of emotional experience located in cultural context. The discussion then turns to an approach that treats emotion as a discursive phenomenon.

### How well do you think the early focus on embodiment and private experience explained emotions?

Can emotions be reduced to biological 'facts' and the perception of embodied experience, or do we need to look outwards towards social influence and culture to understand emotions? While James explained emotions as our individual subjective perception of what is happening in our bodies, others have studied changes in brain chemistry that accompany emotions. Some researchers have attempted to study the combined influences of biology, cognitive appraisal and social situations using an experimental methodology.

The evidence is complex and suggests that emotion is not easily unpicked in simple causal and linear terms – bodily 'states' are appraised and interpreted by individuals in a social context. For example, Schachter's studies provide evidence that 'arousal' (physiological activation) is interpreted by individuals in the context of specific social situations, by cognitive mechanisms of social comparison and causal attribution. More recent research into emotion in



group contexts shows that people's identification with social groups affects their emotional experience. This research illustrates the use of an experimental methodology based within a cognitive social psychological perspective.

The influence of the social on emotions has also been studied by social constructionist researchers who are interested in cultural meanings. In other words, it is not just the *individual* perception of 'arousal' that determines how people interpret a physiological state, but also the *socially* shared localised interpretations that originate in different cultures. Moreover, when people describe their emotions to others, their accounts are usually constructed to fit certain purposes – they are *communications* rather than simple descriptions.

**If social situations and cultural influences are so important in the expression of emotion, why not focus on how people talk about emotions in everyday interactions?**

Discursive psychologists study how emotions are constructed in discourse. Discursive psychology is concerned with how 'emotion words' are actually *used* in everyday talk and how people's understandings of emotional states happen in the context of their talk and interactions with others. Emotion is treated as a conceptual resource that is deployed for conversational purposes. It is not that discursive psychologists entirely reject the idea of underlying emotions, but they are not convinced that what people say about their own and other people's emotions necessarily reflects an underlying 'state'. They therefore focus on how 'emotion words' are used in people's accounts to explain events and actions, to argue and apportion blame. Compare the example in this chapter with Edwards's discussion of emotions in Book 1, Chapter 2.

The chapter concludes by bringing together aspects of discursive psychology with research into the non-verbal communication of emotions, particularly by infants who have not yet learned to speak. Certain aspects of emotion may be communicated by non-verbal rather than by verbal means.

**Examples of course themes**

There are a number of different approaches discussed in this chapter: for example, James's feedback theory, Schachter's two-factor theory, Magda Arnold's appraisal theory, Paul Ekman's work on 'basic' emotions and facial expression, and Edwards's discursive approach. These approaches can be placed along a continuum according to their emphasis on individual or social factors, and this relates to the course theme of individual–society dualism.

**Can you identify which approaches place greater emphasis on the individual and which take more account of social/societal factors?**

Although social aspects of emotion are included in all of the work covered in this chapter, the approaches differ in the way that they explain the relevance of the social to the study of emotion. Some use the social context as a background feature that helps to explain why people label a state of physiological arousal in a certain way. In other approaches, social and cultural context is fundamental to the ways in which people think and talk about emotional experience. There is an interesting implication here for the theme



of agency–structure. How much choice do we have over our emotional reactions to events in our daily lives?

The theme of situated knowledges is also relevant here since psychological theories and commonsense understandings of emotional experience are themselves crucially affected by historical and cultural context.

**Think about the ways in which we describe our emotions at critical moments such as at the start of a romantic relationship or in the middle of a family argument. How are these accounts informed by our commonsense cultural understandings of emotional experience? How might they be different in other cultures?**

### Key concepts

appraisal theory	group identification	relation alignment
autonomic activation	group-based emotions	two-factor theory of emotion
emotion discourse	introspection	
emotional labour	prelinguistic emotion	

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## 2.3 Book 1, Chapter 5, 'Self'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

Wendy Hollway argues that despite our everyday familiarity with the term, concepts of self are many and varied. They are situated in historical time and place and they derive from different theoretical traditions.

**How would you describe your own 'self'? What does your description suggest about the way you define the concept?**

Hollway argues that the variety of concepts of the self is partly a result of how the subject has been approached by philosophers, social and psychological theorists, and the methods they have used to study the self. A historical review of the area suggests that different approaches to the self can be seen as relating to a series of binaries that set up the self as either one thing or its opposite. Examples of these binaries are:

- those approaches that focus on thought *or* those that are concerned with feelings
- emphasis on conscious awareness *or* unconscious motivations
- the coherent, whole self *or* the fragmented self
- the self as active, purposeful agent *or* the self as determined by social and societal influences.



**To what extent do you think that these different views of the self are irreconcilable? For example, can the self be ‘coherent’ and ‘fragmented’ at the same time?**

After the historical review of the concept of ‘self’, this chapter focuses on two theoretical perspectives – the phenomenological and the social psychoanalytic perspective.

**Return to Table 2.1 in Book 1, Chapter 2 and see if you can identify the key assumptions and differences between these two perspectives.**

Three examples of phenomenological research (experience of wearing the burka, an Alzheimer’s sufferer, and a northern working-class man in the UK) are used to demonstrate a focus on uniqueness, lived experience, embodiment and intersubjectivity (shared understanding). The methods of research employed here are participant observation and interviewing.

Phenomenology’s concern to present the subject’s own consciously lived, embodied experience in the above examples can be contrasted with the social psychoanalytic concern to understand the influence of the unconscious mind on the body through the presentation of physical ‘symptoms’ in the example of ‘Vince’s “choice”’ in Section 3.1.

**If you would like to read some more about the phenomenological perspective on the self at this point, you may like to look ahead to Book 1, Chapter 7 in which Linda Finlay and Darren Langdridge discuss related issues around the topic of embodiment.**

In the research examples chosen to illustrate the social psychoanalytic perspective, Hollway takes the psychoanalytic claim that parts of the self are hidden from self-consciousness, and illustrates the implications for methodology. If some of the strongest influences of self on actions and relationships are hidden from ourselves, how does the researcher find out about them? The psychoanalytic method of free association narrative interviewing (FANI) allows the researcher to go beyond the presentation of self given by the subject here (Vince), and to gain access to ‘hidden’ aspects of his unconscious motivations. Hollway also describes the use of psychoanalytic observation as a method for researching infants and children, a method that emphasises unconscious intersubjectivity as a key process in the development of self.

**How would you critically evaluate the different methods described in this chapter? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each one?**

### **Examples of course themes**

There are many places in the chapter where Hollway discusses the relevance of individual–society dualism, agency–structure and situated knowledges. The first of these is expressed centrally in the tension between psychological and sociological approaches to the study of self. The former concentrates on the *intrapsychic* (what happens within the individual), while the latter sees the self as constituted in the *intersubjective* social space between people and in the social meanings available to them. Individual–society dualism is also reproduced in the split between ‘I’ and ‘me’, where the former is the



individual and the latter is the self produced by the social gaze of others. 'I' is also the active pronoun, the subject where change is located, and so represents the agent in the agency–structure dualism.

At the end of the chapter, Hollway argues that the phenomenological and social psychoanalytic perspectives to the self have quite a lot in common and that both offer ways of going beyond the dualisms of individual–society and agency–structure. Throughout the chapter, Hollway emphasises that knowledges about the self are situated with regard to time, place and methodology.

### Key concepts

anxiety	introjection	reflexiveness
depressive position	lifeworld	self-consciousness
epoché	multiple selves	self-esteem
free association	paranoid-schizoid position	unconscious defences
intersubjectivity	projection	

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## 2.4 Book 2, Chapter 2, 'Close relationships'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

Two perspectives are represented by the readings covered in this chapter by Shelley Day Sclater. In Reading 2.1, cognitive social psychological research by Steve Duck is used to explore some of the factors that influence the formation and maintenance of close relationships. Work here focuses on factors such as physical attractiveness; similarities in terms of background and values; and perceptions of the costs and rewards of relationships. In Reading 2.2, social psychoanalytic work conducted by Nancy Chodorow is the second, contrasting, perspective. The emphasis here is that our early relationships with significant others, particularly our parents, exert a determining influence on later adult relationships. Chodorow has a particular interest in explaining the persistence of gender inequalities in society, and traces these back to our relational experiences in early infancy.

As you work through this first substantive Book 2 chapter, note down the main differences in theory and method between the two readings and how these differences direct the kind of research questions that are asked.

### How do you think these differences influence the kind of knowledge that is produced?

As you read through this chapter, it will also be useful to consider how these readings fit within the cognitive social and social psychoanalytic perspectives in this course.



Duck's research fits within the more 'scientific' cognitive social psychological perspective in the sense that researchers are interested in teasing out causal connections between variables using objective, quantifiable measurement. The aim is to explain and predict relationship patterns and to develop general principles of social behaviour. However, Duck is wary of placing too much emphasis on the results of laboratory-based experiments, and is keen to study relationships using a range of methods in everyday settings (as well as to move beyond the boundaries of any single academic discipline). There is recognition here that relationships are positioned in social and cultural contexts that are crucially important.

While social psychoanalytic researchers are also keen to try to explain patterns of relating, the emphasis is more on interpretations and meanings rather than on objective measurements. Research focuses on the importance of unconscious processes and the significance of early relationships. Sclater points out that the unconscious is not amenable to the kinds of objective measurement employed by more 'scientific' approaches in psychology. Within this broad focus of concern, there are many varieties of psychoanalytic theory, and the reading here is based on one particular strand – object relations theory. In this theory, the emphasis is on the mental representations of our earliest significant relationships that we carry around with us as fundamental parts of our unconscious selves. There is recognition that social and cultural context are crucially important, particularly in shaping gender relations.

### Examples of course themes

The themes of power relations, individual–society dualism and situated knowledges are all important in this chapter. For example, Chodorow shows how power inequalities in the context of gender relations can be traced back to early infant experience and the maternal responsibility for 'mothering'. Sclater argues that Chodorow's approach challenges the individual–society dualism by showing how aspects of the social world take root in our internal worlds during early childhood to become intra-psychic processes that are likely to operate throughout our lives. Chodorow's approach also challenges the traditional approach to relationships as taking place between separately constituted individuals within a social context. Instead, it is argued that relationships involve a kind of 'intersubjectivity' – a meshing of unconscious needs, wishes and anxieties. Taken together, the two readings demonstrate how different forms of knowledge about relationships are produced by quite different approaches and methodologies.

### Key concepts

attachment styles

object relations theory

social networks

gender identities

Oedipus complex

introjection

fantasy



## 2.5 Study skills pointers in Block 2

### Note-taking

By this stage in the course, you will have started to develop your own personal strategy for taking notes from a variety of different sources. If you need help with this, remember that there are Open University study skills materials that you can access from the Open University website.

### Critical evaluation

This skill is central to writing TMAs, doing research, and of course evaluating academic articles. Taking a critical approach to academic texts will help you to avoid being over-descriptive in your own writing in TMAs and exam questions. You can pick up some useful tips on how to approach this by looking at how the Book 2 authors have set about their critical evaluation of the original readings in their commentary text.

**Hint:** See Part 1, Section 4 in this *Course Guide* for more information on critical thinking.

**As you work through the readings in Book 2, try to write a list of criteria to apply when doing your own critical evaluation. For example, what theoretical assumptions are being made, what model of the person is described and what methods are used? What other criteria might you apply in critical evaluation?**

## 3 Block 3, Social judgement

This block of work covers Study Weeks 9 to 11 and includes a review week. You should read:

- Book 2, Chapters 3 and 4.

Block 3 takes up key debates that centre on the problem of overly individualised explanations of behaviour and the need to engage more explicitly with social explanations. Initially, both chapters present somewhat traditional positions and treat attitudes and attributions as individual cognitive processes or dispositions as in the cognitive social psychological perspective. This information processing approach is challenged in different ways by discursive psychology (Book 2, Chapter 3), and phenomenological psychology (Book 2, Chapter 4). Although these two approaches are different from one another, both claim that cognitive explanations fail to engage with the varying ways in which the social is embedded in the process of interpreting others.



### 3.1 Book 2, Chapter 3, 'Attitudes'

#### What will I learn from this chapter?

You will see that this chapter contains three readings: two from a cognitive social perspective and one from a discursive psychological perspective.

**Before you begin work on this chapter, make a note of your own commonsense ideas about attitudes. What do you think an attitude is? Once you have read this chapter, see how your definition compares with those suggested by social psychologists.**

You will see from Stephanie Taylor's introduction that definitions are important here. The discussion requires you to move beyond an everyday definition of an attitude to consider how different theorists have defined attitudes, and what kinds of methods they have used to study these psychological constructs that cannot be directly observed. In addition, Taylor points out that although the first two readings are based within a similar perspective (cognitive social psychology), they are very different in their style of presentation, the first adopting a more 'journalistic' style, and the second written in a more conventional 'scientific' way. The extracts chosen here illustrate some of the historical developments and changes in attitude research and academic writing.

Assumptions traditionally made within the cognitive social perspective are that attitudes are internal psychological constructs; that it is possible to access these attitudes using objective, quantifiable measurements; and that it is theoretically possible to use some measurement of attitude to predict behaviour, although the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is clearly not straightforward. All of the readings in this chapter address the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, but they do so in very different ways.

**Think back to an occasion when you were asked to complete an attitude questionnaire of some sort. What sort of issues did it raise for you and did it present any problems in terms of your responses? Would your responses allow someone else to accurately predict your behaviour towards that object?**

In Reading 3.1, Richard LaPiere uses the evidence from his study to challenge the connection between attitudes and actions, and hence the usefulness of questionnaires in attitude research. This challenge is taken up in Reading 3.2 by Icek Ajzen who argues that it is possible to use attitudes to predict behaviour but only if a suitably sophisticated measurement of attitude is obtained. In particular, Ajzen argues that if one wishes to predict a very specific behaviour, then one needs an equally specific measure of attitude. This should include the individual's attitude towards the behaviour, the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour (called the 'subjective norm'), their intention to perform the behaviour, and the degree to which they perceive that they have control over the behaviour. This approach was put forward as the theory of reasoned action, but later modified as the theory of planned behaviour.



**The study discussed in this second extract focuses on mothers' decisions to breast-feed or to bottle-feed their babies. Think of another behaviour (such as a consumer decision or voting behaviour), and work out appropriate questions that would relate to the various aspects of the theory of planned behaviour.**

In Reading 3.3, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell present a very different approach to this whole area based on discursive psychology. Like LaPiere, they challenge the use of questionnaires as a means of accessing attitudes and predicting behaviour. More fundamentally, however, they question the whole idea of an attitude being an internal psychological construct. Rather than focusing attention on the individual speaker as a holder of attitudes, their attention turns to the language or 'talk' itself. Language is seen here as a form of social action in its own right, and interaction between speakers is the context in which meanings are constructed. According to this view, meanings are not located within individuals but emerge through talk in social contexts.

**What do you think are the main differences between the cognitive social perspective and the discursive perspective with regard to the topic of attitudes?**

You might, for instance, want to consider the degree to which the perspectives accept that there is such an entity as an attitude that can be measured in some way. As well as theoretical differences, there are also important methodological differences in the ways in which research in these areas is conducted. These are two very different perspectives on attitudes, and both have strong research traditions in social psychology. Each approach presents ongoing challenges for the other.

**Think about how researchers working with the theory of planned behaviour would respond to the challenge posed by discursive psychology. What does the former approach offer that is distinctive or useful? How could research from each of these perspectives be usefully applied in everyday settings? What are the implications for attitude change?**

### **Examples of course themes**

The themes of power relations and situated knowledges are very relevant here. In Reading 3.1 by LaPiere, the issue of social inequality was taken as a 'given' and inspired the design of the research conducted at a time when racial prejudice was widespread. Reading 3.3 by Potter and Wetherell also focuses on the expression of prejudice. In this reading, attitudes and prejudice are approached in a way that foregrounds the power issues that are inherent in the circulation of everyday discourses. The discursive psychological perspective treats the 'objects' of people's 'attitudes' as part of what is constructed in everyday discourse. For example, in expressing an 'attitude' towards a particular category of people, speakers are simultaneously constructing both the category and its meaning by drawing on existing cultural discourses. Social inequalities and therefore power relations are embedded in the everyday discourses that circulate. For discursive psychology, the focus is on how these discourses are repeatedly brought into play and on what active



use is made of them in social interaction. Our understandings of prejudice and how it is expressed and reproduced in everyday contexts derive from research that is situated in particular historical and cultural contexts.

### Key concepts

attitudes	discourses	theory of reasoned action
constitution	subjective norm	variability
context	theory of planned behaviour	

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## 3.2 Book 2, Chapter 4, 'The fundamental attribution error'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

This chapter focuses on the topic of 'attribution': How do people attribute causes to their own and to other people's behaviour and actions? The chapter considers some of the tensions between the attribution process as described by theorists working within the cognitive social perspective and an alternative approach drawn from phenomenological psychology. These represent very different ways of understanding how we make sense of actions and events.

In their study of the attribution process, cognitive social psychologists have tended to use experimental methods to control and manipulate variables in an attempt to explain patterns of attribution. There has been a primary focus on individual information processing and some of the biases that seem to be inherent in the attribution process. For example, why do we have a tendency to attribute others' behaviour to individual dispositions rather than to situational factors (the 'fundamental attribution error')? The chapter begins by taking you back in time to the original contribution of Fritz Heider's theory of the person as an 'intuitive psychologist'. He argued that we intuitively try to test the world in the same way that a scientist would, seeking to explain events around us and, specifically, attributing causes to internal (dispositional) or external (situational) factors.

**Darren Langdridge's introduction to the chapter gives an everyday example of how the 'intuitive psychologist' might respond in a driving situation. From your own experience, can you think of any other examples when we try to explain behaviour as caused by internal dispositions or external situations?**

In cognitive social psychology, individual perception and information processing are at the heart of any explanation of causal attribution and the fundamental attribution error. The review of experimental work that you will find in Reading 4.1 by Lee Ross illustrates some of the many factors that have been manipulated to tease out the causes of the fundamental attribution error.



In his critique that follows the reading, Langdridge argues that research in this area has become too focused on the individual and that rather than conducting still more experimental studies, researchers would do better to turn to phenomenological psychology for an alternative view of the attribution process.

**The distinction between internal and external causation is fundamental to experimental work on attribution. Why do you think this might be problematic to phenomenological psychologists?**

Phenomenological psychology challenges the idea that individuals can be treated as separate and self-contained units, proposing instead that we are relational beings who act on our worlds in order to create meaning. It is claimed that the distinction between the person and the situation (or individual and social world) is a false division since we can never separate the individual from the environment. Everything must be seen in context, and it is not possible to break things down into their component parts. For this reason, attempting to attribute causes to internal or external factors is misguided.

In Reading 4.2, Darren Langdridge and Trevor Butt argue that the fundamental attribution error rests on an assumption of dualism: that there is a clear division between what is inside and outside the person. This is a cultural assumption that is held to be obvious, and it is reinforced by cognitive social psychology where the social world is treated as a contextual variable that influences individual thinking. The model of the person is the information processing individual in a social context.

By contrast, in the phenomenological perspective, the model of the person is the consciously experiencing embodied individual, always in relation with the social world. People are seen as primarily social beings, immersed in the social world and the phenomenological project attempts to capture this experience. The task for social psychology is not to discover causal relationships concerning processes of attribution, but to understand social experience and the construction of meaning.

**Look again at Table 2.1 in Book 1, Chapter 2. Can you identify the main theoretical and methodological differences between the cognitive social and phenomenological perspectives? Do you think that these perspectives share anything in common in their approach to attribution?**

The cognitive social perspective gives primacy to the individual's cognitive world, in particular the ability to process information. The phenomenological perspective is more focused on the detailed ways in which individuals describe their lived experience of being in the social world. Here, then, the focus is on 'meaning making' and the idea that we actively create our worlds through our senses and in our relationships with others.

The model of the person as an 'intuitive psychologist' implied in the reading by Ross contrasts with the model of the person as an 'experiencing being' in the Langdridge and Butt reading. These different models of the person have different implications for method. The 'intuitive psychologist' model implies the use of an experimental scientific method that may involve a reduction of



contextual detail. The model of the person as an ‘experiencing being’ implies a focus on detailed first-person descriptions.

### Examples of course themes

The theme of individual–society dualism is particularly relevant to this chapter. Langdridge and Butt criticise the cognitive social perspective for reproducing a dualism between what is internal and what is external to the person. They argue that the emphasis in this approach is to focus on individual information processing where the social context is simply the backdrop against which behaviour occurs. The phenomenological perspective treats perception as a fundamentally social process. Here, there are no clear distinctions between the person and the social world, and our task is to make sense of experience through an appreciation of its social context.

### Key concepts

attribution	fundamental attribution error	intuitive psychologist
existential phenomenology	internal and external attributions	the ‘lived world’

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## 3.3 Study skills pointers in Block 3

You have three weeks to complete the two chapters in Block 3 and the review of the first part of the course.

Book 2, Chapters 3 and 4 can both be used as examples of how to carry out critical evaluation. The chapter authors each provide a wrap-around text to guide your path through two or three different readings. The introduction and commentary sections are useful examples of how academic writers carry out a critical evaluation.

### **How do the chapter authors set about their critical evaluation? What kinds of criteria do they use to compare and contrast the different readings?**

As you read through the chapters, notice how the authors identify the topic and aims of the readings. They also identify the different theoretical approaches and the methods applied. They identify what theoretical assumptions are being made. For instance, what model of the person is being used? Is there more emphasis on individual cognitive processes or social processes? These are the kinds of critical questions that can be asked of any piece of academic research in social psychology.

## 3.4 Using your review week

This is the first opportunity in the course to spend a week reflecting on what you have covered so far. There are several proactive ways in which to do this.



- Refresh your memory. Read the introductions of the two course texts and skim through your notes on the different chapters and DVD sections. This will help you to situate the work you have already done in the context of the course as a whole, and to see how this relates to the rest of the course.
- Did you attempt all of the activities in the textbook chapters? If not, this may be a useful way to review the materials in a different way.
- Now is the time to consider which parts of the course you have so far found difficult to understand. You should re-read those sections. If there are aspects of theories, concepts or methods that you still do not understand, this is a good time to seek help from your tutor.
- Think about your study skills development. Do you need to spend some time reviewing how you set about your note-taking or your TMAs? Remember that there is help available from the Open University website and of course from your tutor.
- Return to Table 2.1 in Book 1, Chapter 2 which shows the key features of the four theoretical perspectives in the course. Can you match the perspectives, methods and research areas discussed in the chapters to the table? It would be good to return to this activity and update your notes as you work through the remaining topics in the course. This will help you later when you come to revise for the exam. Table 3.1 will give you a start in this activity.



Table 3.1 Perspectives and research areas discussed in Blocks 2 and 3

Perspective	Chapter	Research area
<b>Cognitive social psychology</b>	Emotion (Book 1, Chapter 4)	Schachter's two-factor theory of emotion developed using experimental studies; appraisal theory of emotion; emotion in groups.
	Close relationships (Book 2, Chapter 2)	Duck's research on interpersonal attraction; perceptions of the costs and benefits of relationships.
	Attitudes (Book 2, Chapter 3)	Attitude-behaviour relationships; the use of questionnaires to predict behaviour; Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour.
	The fundamental attribution error (Book 2, Chapter 4)	Experimental studies of the fundamental attribution error.
<b>Discursive psychology</b>	Families (Book 1, Chapter 3)	Reynolds's and Wetherell's work on 'singleness' using interviews; Dixon's and Wetherell's work on gender and the domestic division of labour in the home.
	Emotion (Book 1, Chapter 4)	Edwards's discursive approach to emotion in everyday talk.
	Attitudes (Book 2, Chapter 3)	Potter's and Wetherell's discursive approach to the study of prejudice in New Zealand.
<b>Phenomenological psychology</b>	Self (Book 1, Chapter 5)	Seierstad's account of an Afghan woman wearing a burka; Ashworth's and Ashworth's description of the lifeworld of an Alzheimer's sufferer; Charlesworth's research into working-class experience.
	The fundamental attribution error (Book 2, Chapter 4)	Langridge's and Butt's critique of the experimental study of attribution processes and particularly the internal-external distinction that underlies this research.
<b>Social psychoanalytic psychology</b>	Families (Book 1, Chapter 3)	Lucey's work on sibling relations in the family, and her study of five sisters.
	Self (Book 1, Chapter 5)	Hollway's and Jefferson's study of Vince; the use of free association narrative interviewing (FANI); the use of psychoanalytic observation to study infants and children.
	Close relationships (Book 2, Chapter 2)	Chodorow's work on the reproduction of mothering based on object relations theory.



## 4 Block 4, The project proposal

This block of work covers Study Weeks 12 to 14 and focuses on the initial preparation for your research project and the project proposal (TMA 03). At this point, you should:

- read the *Project Booklet*
- consult the *Assignment Booklet*
- watch DVD 2.

The research element of DD307 is heavily weighted in your continuous assessment – the proposal (TMA 03) carries 15 per cent and the final project (TMA 05) carries 30 per cent towards your overall continuous assessment score. By this point in the course, you will appreciate the central place of research in social psychology. You now have an opportunity to conduct your own project. Although carrying out research is always a time-consuming activity, hopefully you should also find that it is one of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects of studying social psychology.

### 4.1 DVD 2

This DVD is focused on helping you to conduct your research project. It begins by helping you to think through your research topic and the process of coming up with an idea for a project. Students who have already conducted research projects in various contexts discuss the issues and challenges involved. The DVD moves on to give you examples of individual interviews and a group discussion. It then turns from data collection to data analysis and illustrates in some detail three different approaches to analysing transcripts, based on discursive psychological, phenomenological and social psychoanalytic perspectives. In your own project, you will be choosing one of these perspectives as the basis for collection and analysis of your own data.

Now you should turn to the *Project Booklet*, where you will find help with every stage of planning and conducting your project.

## 5 Block 5, Group processes

This block of work covers Study Weeks 15 to 18 and includes TMA 04. You should read:

- Book 2, Chapter 5
- Book 1, Chapter 6
- Book 2, Chapter 6.



The material covered in this block turns to the study of people in groups. This has been a thriving area of research in social psychology, and there are many different approaches to studying this topic. In the three chapters that you will read here, you will find research conducted within a cognitive social psychological perspective contrasted with a discursive psychological perspective. A common theme across all of this work is the important role played by *social categorisation* and *social identity*. These concepts refer to our tendency to divide the social world into 'us' and 'them', and our associated sense of identification with certain of these groups and categories. However, researchers from the different perspectives treat these concepts in different ways. Cognitive social psychologists would tend to see social categorisation and social identity as internalised in the minds of individuals, while discursive psychologists would see categories as constructions that are formulated by speakers or taken up from the wider discursive environment and used in ongoing interactions.

It should be stressed here, as elsewhere, that there is much variety *within* these broad theoretical perspectives. Within the cognitive social perspective, there are important differences according to the emphasis placed on cognitive or social processes, for example. Some researchers emphasise cognition, applying cognitive theories of information processing to the context of group processes. This tradition is often referred to as 'social cognition' (or the socio-cognitive perspective), and originates largely from North American experimental social psychology. Others emphasise 'social identity', and this approach derives strongly from European social psychology. It is this latter approach that you will find mainly represented in the readings here, in particular, the contribution of social identity theory (see Book 1, Chapter 6 and Book 2, Chapter 6).

Within the broad perspective of discursive psychology, there is some variation according to whether the reality of the categories themselves is accepted. You will see that Michael Billig (Reading 6.2, Book 2, Chapter 6), while critical of the cognitive social perspective for some reasons, does not set out to challenge the reality of the categories themselves. By contrast, Jonathan Potter and Stephen Reicher (Reading 5.2, Book 2, Chapter 5) argue in their study that the categories themselves are socially constructed. These researchers present a challenge at the point of definition. For example, they question the validity of considering a situation in terms of pre-existing notions of group membership. These differences in emphasis within the perspectives will become clearer as you work through the course material.

**Before you begin your work on this block of material, think about the word 'group'. What are the defining features of a group of people? For instance, when does a line of people waiting for a bus become a psychological 'group'? Perhaps it is when the bus is late and they start to discuss this with each other! What does this tell us about the significance of shared goals, common identification and language in group processes?**

**Which social groups do you identify with and how do you feel about your membership of those groups? How do you talk about those**



groups with others, and how does your talk differ from one context to another?

## 5.1 Book 2, Chapter 5, 'Intragroup processes and entitativity'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

The focus in this chapter is on the processes that go on *within* groups (intragroup processes), and the ways in which group membership itself is constructed. The two readings in this chapter both concern social psychological processes in groups, but the groups concerned are very different. In Reading 5.1, by Irving Janis, the group is a small decision-making policy group. In Reading 5.2, by Jonathan Potter and Stephen Reicher, the focus is on a crowd situation. A key question then is: to what extent are the groups here comparable?

According to social identity theory, the critical feature, common to all groups, is a sense of *identification* with the group. This feature is common to small groups and to large-scale groups (such as crowds) and social categories. Thus, although there may be differences in size (and many other aspects), there may be similar psychological processes at work concerning the consequences of group identification. The term 'entitativity' captures this idea and is used to convey the feeling that a collection of individuals is really a group in a psychological sense.

Central to the discussion in this chapter is an idea that an important consequence of a sense of heightened identification with a group is that people 'lose' their individuality, suspend critical thought and are liable to engage in (usually aggressive) actions which they would not do if acting alone.

**Think back to DVD 1 (*Production of Knowledge*) and specifically Philip Zimbardo's 'prison' study where this idea of the 'loss' of self in a group was an important theme in explaining aggressive behaviour. By contrast, in Stephen Reicher's and Alex Haslam's 'prison' study, the researchers were keen to emphasise that taking on group identities does not necessarily lead to more negative and aggressive forms of behaviour. In their account, based on social identity theory, people have choices about the ways in which they negotiate the meanings of any particular social identity.**

Traditionally then, groups have often been seen to have negative influences on their members, with crowds being the focus of distinct concern. In Book 2, Chapter 5, Ann Phoenix considers two research examples that address the question of the impact of groups on their individual members. In Reading 5.1, Janis describes his research into small policy-making groups in the US who made political decisions that turned out to have disastrous results, for example, the Pearl Harbour bombing, the Vietnam War and Watergate. In trying to understand how groups of 'brilliant, conscientious men' could make such bad decisions, Janis makes use of the concept of 'groupthink'.



**Have you already heard of groupthink? What does the term mean to you? Have a look at the eight 'symptoms' of groupthink. Can you think of any group situations that you have experienced when symptoms of groupthink seemed to be operating? What procedures could be put in place to help group members to resist these pressures?**

Despite the methodological flaws that Phoenix points to in Janis's work, the ideas have been taken up and used in everyday contexts. They resonate with other 'commonsense' ideas about group processes and a body of experimental research concerning the impact of highly cohesive (and entitative) groups on their members and the pressures in such groups to 'go along' with the majority view.

Reading 5.2, by Potter and Reicher, also examines the consequences of entitativity but, this time, in the context of crowd behaviour. Rather than treating group boundaries and group cohesiveness as fixed background factors, as Janis does, these researchers adopt a discursive perspective to explore the complex ways in which boundaries and cohesiveness are constructed in talk. In this sense, they are not looking at a pre-defined group, in the way that Janis is, but at the action of defining a group and the effects of this action in context. The membership category is that of the 'community', and the paper explores the discourses of community that circulated after a riot in the St Paul's district of Bristol, UK, in 1980. In the light of previous discussion, it is interesting to note that, unlike many notions of group membership that tend to have negative connotations, the word 'community' is a relatively rare example of the way in which group membership can be cast in a positive light with associations of warmth, support and solidarity.

The starting point for these researchers was a critique by Reicher of the negative constructions of crowd behaviour, which had dominated research in this area, and particularly the assumed loss of individuality in crowds. Adopting a theoretical framework called *self-categorisation theory* (which is related to social identity theory), Reicher argued that identity is not lost in a crowd but *shifts* from personal to social. Incidents of crowd violence are not 'mindless' forms of action but have behavioural norms and limits determined by the crowd's shared social identity and the meanings attached to it. The meanings attached to social identity (in small groups and crowds) are varied, and there is no inevitable connection between group membership and negative behaviour. This point is also stressed by Reicher and Haslam in their critique of Zimbardo's 'prison' study (see DVD 1).

In Reading 5.2, Potter and Reicher use a discursive analysis to explore the use of the category 'community' and the notion of 'community relations' by members of the crowd. 'Community' is seen as a 'linguistic repertoire' (or interpretative repertoire) that is used for description, evaluation and explanation. Analysis shows that 'community' can be constructed in many different ways and that the boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are used flexibly in different accounts. These authors show that defining groups and constructing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion around them is not a trivial exercise, but has important social and political consequences.



## Examples of course themes

In studying the ways in which categories are constructed in discourse, our attention is drawn to power relations. Rather than seeing certain groups or categories as fixed or predetermined, we may question *why* categories are constructed in this way and with what effects. In their analysis of the St Paul's riot, Potter and Reicher show how specific categories are used flexibly in different accounts, and they discuss in particular the consequences of various uses of the community repertoire. The discursive perspective encourages us to question the construction of categories and the boundaries drawn between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The boundaries drawn around certain categories in our society may be taken for granted and seen as 'commonsense', and yet they may reflect power relations between different social groups.

### Key concepts

discourse analysis	groupthink	self-categorisation theory
entitativity	interpretative repertoires	social categorisation
group cohesiveness	linguistic repertoires	

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## 5.2 Book 1, Chapter 6, 'Prejudice, conflict and conflict reduction'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

In this chapter, John Dixon discusses some of the discipline's main theoretical perspectives on group conflict. The discussion begins with those theories that stress individual personality factors as lying at the root of prejudice against the members of different groups. An important example of this tradition is the theory of the 'authoritarian personality'. Drawing on psychodynamic principles, it is argued that unconscious anger towards authority figures is displaced onto 'scapegoats', being expressed as a generalised hatred towards anyone seen as 'different'.

An alternative approach that attempts to explain the widespread incidence of prejudice (rather than focusing on the most extreme individuals) is one that stresses the idea of 'faulty cognitions' (described by Dixon as the socio-cognitive perspective on prejudice). Here it is argued that biases that are inherent in our information processing mechanisms lead to prejudice and stereotyping on a wide scale. By contrast with the personality approach, prejudice is not the sign of an 'abnormal' mind but an unfortunate by-product of our normal cognitive processes. According to this account then, we are all susceptible to prejudiced thinking.

An important recent development within this cognitive perspective is the idea of *implicit prejudice*. Here it is argued that although explicit expressions of



prejudice (such as might be elicited by a traditional questionnaire approach) have declined in recent years for a variety of reasons, this has been offset by a rise in a more subtle and unconscious form of prejudice. Because people are less aware of this type of prejudice, it may be harder to bring about change.

**Two of the approaches discussed so far draw on psychoanalytic theory and the role of the unconscious in prejudice. Go back to Wendy Hollway's description of the social psychoanalytic perspective in Book 1, Chapter 2 and think about how the principles described there relate to the theories presented in Book 1, Chapter 6.**

The next part of Dixon's chapter considers group-based approaches to prejudice beginning with an example of conflict in the context of Northern Ireland. He illustrates the role of attribution processes in conflict situations. Dixon goes on to discuss Muzafer Sherif's *realistic conflict theory*, which emphasises the significance of structural features of the group context (conflicting or compatible group goals); and Henri Tajfel's *social identity theory*, which emphasises the role of people's sense of identification with social groups. This latter approach has been the most dominant approach to the study of group processes and conflict (see Book 2, Chapter 6).

**A great deal of the research discussed so far has been based on experimental studies. What criticisms would be levelled at this work by discursive psychologists? How would their approach differ in its aims and methods?**

Discursive psychologists focus on how people talk about groups and how they construct the meanings of social relations and group identities. Thus, for example, while much of the work undertaken within Tajfel's social identity theory takes for granted the social categories involved (for instance, ethnic or religious groups), discursive psychologists would seek to explore the categories used by speakers and how certain categories achieve particular significance in our society and the meanings attached to them. Why do certain categories become so important at certain times and in certain contexts? How do certain accounts serve to perpetuate prejudice and conflict? Social categories here are seen as rhetorical and political as well as cognitive resources. (Note that Dixon comments that this discursive work is framed within a broader social constructionist tradition; look back to Reading 3.3, Book 2, Chapter 3 for another example of discursive analysis.)

**To what extent are the cognitive social and discursive psychological perspectives complementary in their approach to the study of prejudice? Are there some areas of fundamental disagreement?**

In Section 5 of Chapter 6, Dixon turns to the topic of conflict reduction and the approach that has had the greatest impact on public policy, namely *the contact hypothesis*. According to this approach, the way to reduce conflict between the members of different groups is to bring them together in contact situations. The details concerning the most effective type of situation have been the subject of much debate, and Dixon reviews the many factors that have been explored, taking into account insights from everyday examples of conflict and from different theoretical traditions.



**Think about the many approaches to prejudice that have been covered in this chapter. Take each approach in turn and work out the implications for reducing prejudice. How could the research be turned into practical ideas for tackling prejudice? Is this something that social psychologists should be doing?**

### Examples of course themes

Each of the approaches discussed here combines individual and societal factors but they do so in very different ways. The issue of trying to tackle prejudice clearly relates to the agency–structure debate. For example, to what extent are levels of prejudice *determined* by aspects of personality developed during childhood (authoritarian personality); or by inbuilt features of our cognitive processing mechanisms (socio-cognitive approach); or by structural/situational features (realistic conflict theory); or by the meaning systems and practices that have become established in a society over time (discursive perspective)? Should we challenge the categories and meanings that have become established within a society, perhaps in the first instance by changing the ways in which we talk and the language that we use? You might like to think about debates around ‘political correctness’ here.

‘Commonsense’ knowledge about the origins of prejudice informs the initiatives developed in many different everyday contexts for dealing with prejudice, such as in the classroom and workplace. For example, the widespread use of the contact hypothesis is based on the idea that prejudice is the result of ignorance at an individual level and that bringing people together to ‘get to know each other’ will bring about positive outcomes. Alternative approaches, focused on a group or societal level of analysis, have quite different implications for tackling prejudice.

### Key concepts

aversive racists	the contact hypothesis	interpretative repertoires
authoritarian personality	discourses	realistic conflict theory
cognitive miser	dogmatic personality	categorisation
cognitive rigidity	implicit prejudice	social identity theory

## 5.3 Book 2, Chapter 6, ‘Intergroup processes: social identity theory’

### What will I learn from this chapter?

In this chapter, you will find a detailed account of *social identity theory*, which has been the dominant approach to the study of group processes, both within groups (intragroup relations) and between groups (intergroup relations).



Steven Brown begins the chapter by commenting that an important issue in the development of this approach was to move away from an emphasis on groups as a negative influence, distorting the otherwise rational thinking of the individual (see also Book 2, Chapter 5). This is a theme that runs throughout this block of the course.

**Think back to the beginning of DVD 1 (perhaps even watch it again at this point). The ‘prison’ studies conducted by Philip Zimbardo and by Stephen Reicher and Alex Haslam are good examples of research into intergroup processes (in this case, between ‘prisoners’ and ‘guards’). Think about the relationship between personal and social identity in these studies.**

You will see from Reading 6.1, by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, that social identity theory is an attempt to blend social and cognitive aspects of intergroup relations. (It is interesting though that despite Tajfel’s expressed concern to work across disciplinary boundaries and use a variety of methods that could embrace elements of social context, a large proportion of research conducted in this area has been conducted by psychologists using experimental studies.)

The distinction between personal and social identity is at the core of social identity theory. In particular everyday situations – for example, in crowds or in situations of conflict – our social identity becomes salient. In these situations, our behaviour towards members of our own group (the ‘ingroup’) and members of relevant ‘outgroups’ is described as ‘intergroup’ behaviour. This means acting with the interests and values of our group uppermost in mind, rather than acting in terms of our own personal motivations and beliefs.

Tajfel and Turner go on to outline an important set of experiments, called the *minimal group experiments*. These experiments show how easy it is to create intergroup behaviour in which people show favouritism towards people in their own group. Even in an experimental situation where groups are created on an entirely random basis (i.e. they are entirely ‘minimal’ in the sense that they consist *only* of a categorisation with no related activities), participants still favour anonymous members of their own group rather than anonymous members of another group in their distribution of rewards. In fact, their distribution of rewards (points representing money) showed that an important strategy driving their decisions was not to accumulate the maximum possible amount of money, but to allow the ingroup to come away from the experiment with more money than the outgroup. A primary motivation was thus to make sure that ‘we’ did better than ‘them’.

**Think about the procedure in the minimal group experiments. On the one hand, the artificiality of this situation can be seen as a weakness since it bears so little relation to everyday group membership which is imbued with social meanings. On the other hand, the artificiality of the situation can also be seen as a strength. How else could researchers isolate the key variable of social categorisation (‘us’ versus ‘them’) and test the significance of this factor taken alone? You might like to look back at Haslam’s arguments about the advantages of experimentation on DVD 1.**



These experiments were used to suggest the crucial connections between our membership in social groups and our sense of self-esteem. Doing 'better' than the outgroup is a way for group members to boost their own self-esteem by being a member of the 'best' group. Applying these ideas to everyday groups and social categories allows us to appreciate the tensions and conflicts that occur between groups as group members struggle to achieve 'superiority' for their own group. Tajfel and Turner discuss the situations in which conflict between groups occupying different status positions in a social hierarchy is most likely to occur.

**Think of some groups to which you belong, for example, a work group or friendship group. Is there any sense of status hierarchy between groups? How do members of the various groups make comparisons between the groups? Is there any attempt to demonstrate that 'we' are 'better' than 'them'?**

Reading 6.2, by Michael Billig, provides a discursive critique of the cognitive social perspective on group conflict and prejudice. He argues that discursive psychology is better able to account for the flexible and complex ways in which we use social categories on a daily basis and that categorisation is something that we do actively through language (see also Jonathan Potter's and Stephen Reicher's related argument in a crowd context in Reading 5.2, Book 2, Chapter 5).

Billig argues that social identity theory does not provide an adequate explanation for extreme prejudice. The theory was developed against the backdrop of the events of the Second World War and yet Tajfel, who was a Holocaust survivor himself, did not apply the theory to that event. Billig suggests that Tajfel's decision not to address those historical events in his own social psychological work may have stemmed from a wish not to 'explain away' the atrocities of that time. Billig argues that the extent of the bigotry and hatred involved at that time is beyond the scope of social identity theory. To understand extreme prejudice or bigotry, it is necessary, he argues, to include ideological and emotional factors that are downplayed in a more cognitive account.

Billig's critique of the cognitive basis of social identity theory leads him to argue for the place of a certain kind of discursive account that attempts to bridge the gap between systems of social categorisation and individual emotions that are based partly on unconscious processes. (Tajfel himself was keen to move away from psychoanalytic explanations for prejudice.) This is rather different from other strands of discursive work (see, for example, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell in Reading 3.3, Book 2, Chapter 3; and Potter and Reicher in Reading 5.2, Book 2, Chapter 5), in which there is some questioning of whether 'emotion language' is directly representative of some underlying emotional state. Of course, emotions may also be seen as constructed in shared discourse rather than as individual phenomena (see Book 1, Chapter 4).

**In his approach here, Billig has opened up the possibility of combining aspects of cognitive, discursive and social psychoanalytic theory. Do you think this offers a useful combination for studying**



**both more and less extreme forms of prejudice? Are there any problems with bringing together all of these perspectives?**

### Examples of course themes

As with Book 1, Chapter 6, the theme of individual–society is important here in the various approaches to intergroup relations and prejudice. For example, social identity theory emphasises individual cognitive processes underlying intergroup behaviour, whereas the discursive approach, advocated by Billig, stresses the need to incorporate ideological aspects of prejudice and bigotry. This latter approach is one that directs our attention particularly to wider societal factors in the study of group processes and thereby also to the role of power relations. As in Reading 5.2, Book 2, Chapter 5, there is an interest here in the construction of social categories and the effects of that construction in everyday contexts.

There are close connections between the three chapters in this block and the ways in which the course themes emerge in the study of relations within and between groups.

### Key concepts

depersonalisation	interpersonal behaviour	social competition
emotional investment	minimal groups	social creativity
ideology	hate-talk	social identity
individual mobility	social categorisation	
intergroup behaviour	social comparison	

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## 5.4 A final note on the Block 5 chapters

**Now that you have completed the reading for Block 5, it would be useful to compare the contributions of the cognitive social and discursive psychological perspectives to the study of groups. What are the main contributions of each perspective? Return to Table 3.1, started in Part 2, Section 3.4 of this *Course Guide*, and add in the examples of research covered in this block.**

In this block, it is important to appreciate some of the differences *within* the cognitive social perspective and the discursive psychological perspective. In relation to the cognitive social perspective, in one strand of work that dominated the field for many years (for example, Philip Zimbardo's 'prison' study and Irving Janis's work on 'groupthink'), group membership was cast in a very negative light. In more recent work, exemplified by social identity theory, the meanings attached to group membership are seen to vary



according to social context. Group membership is not necessarily associated with negative outcomes.

Social identity theorists have traditionally been primarily concerned with teasing out cause and effect in processes of social categorisation and identity, using experimental paradigms. Discursive psychologists, by contrast, use qualitative methods to focus on the ways in which social identities are constructed in discourse. As we have seen, there is some variation in the extent to which the groups themselves are seen as socially constructed.

## 5.5 Study skills pointers in Block 5

You have four weeks to complete the reading in Block 5 and to write your assignment. By this point in the course, you have read quite a lot of material relating to the course themes and perspectives and you should be able to make more effective use of these organising principles in your writing. When you are discussing a particular perspective, keep in mind the sorts of critical points that theorists working with alternative perspectives would make. The material in Block 5 focuses on the cognitive social and discursive psychological perspectives so it is important to have a clear sense of the criticisms that each would make of the other. However, you might also like to think about the phenomenological and social psychoanalytic perspectives in relation to the material discussed in this block. How would theorists in these traditions view the research presented here?

Because this block of material comes between the project proposal (TMA 03) and the project itself (TMA 05), you will need to be organised with your notes. You may find it difficult to put aside your project and the feedback on your proposal which you will be getting from your tutor at this point. It may be useful to add occasional thoughts to your research diary while you concentrate your main energies on the Block 5 material. Conducting research can be a very engrossing activity, but all researchers have to be able to put their research to one side sometimes to enable them to concentrate on other academic demands. Hopefully, you will find that you come back to your project refreshed and with some new ideas that you have gained from your Block 5 reading.

## 6 Block 6, The project

This block of work covers Study Weeks 19 to 21 and focuses on the project (TMA 05). At this point, you should:

- return to the *Project Booklet*
- consult the *Assignment Booklet*
- watch DVD 2 again, focusing on those parts that are especially relevant for the methodological approach that you have chosen for your project.



At this stage in the course, you have the opportunity to carry out a piece of independent research based on a topic from the course that particularly interests you, and of building on your project proposal (TMA 03). Now go back to the *Project Booklet*, which will guide you through this process.

You will see that this block is followed by a study break week in Week 22. This is an opportunity to give yourself a short break after the submission of your project and before you move on to the final stages of the course.

## 7 Block 7, The production of knowledge

This block of work covers Study Weeks 23 to 26 and includes TMA 06 in Study Week 30. You should read:

- Book 2, Chapter 7
- Book 1, Chapter 7
- Book 2, Chapter 8.

All of the chapters in this block have a particular concern with the production of social psychological knowledge, and so this block rounds off the course by returning to some of the ideas discussed by Wendy Hollway in Chapters 1 and 2 in Book 1. As Trevor Butt puts it in Section 1 of Book 2, Chapter 8:

We too readily think that knowledge is discovered, but it is constructed as well as discovered – what we think of as facts are made as well as found. Patterns of behaviour do not lie around waiting to be picked up, they are only visible within the searchlight of a particular theory.

Rather than treating social psychological knowledge as pre-existing, waiting to be discovered, it is argued instead that we, as psychologists, *construct* this knowledge (about behaviour, embodiment and personality). Since we are ourselves members of society, the theories that we produce will to some extent reflect the surrounding culture and meanings in which we are embedded.

This is illustrated in different ways by the material in these chapters. However, a common theme is a critique of the idea that social psychological knowledge can be treated as an objective entity, separate from the people who produced it and the surrounding context, and that ‘experts’ who have access to this knowledge can use it in an objective, scientific way, for example, to measure and classify aspects of human psychology. Contrasted with this, is a view of social psychological knowledge as socially situated, produced in a particular social and historical context and telling us as much about that context as about the object that is purportedly under study. Sometimes, when we stand back from ‘taken for granted’ knowledge, we can appreciate that this may be just one way of representing the issues at stake and there may be other alternative ways of understanding those issues. Of course, this idea is present throughout DD307 as one of the interrogative themes (the theme of situated knowledges



is one important aspect of the production of knowledge). In this block of material, these ideas are developed more fully.

**As you read through the material in this block, you may like to reflect again on the piece of social psychological research that you have just conducted as your project. In what ways was your own study a reflection of a distinct social and historical context?**

## 7.1 Book 2, Chapter 7, 'Bystander intervention'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

Viv Burr begins this chapter by discussing an incident that took place in New York in 1964. This was the rape and murder of a young woman called Kitty Genovese, a crime that was witnessed by 38 people (bystanders) who failed to come to her aid. This incident has become famous in the history of social psychology since it set off a whole body of research into 'bystander intervention' (or lack of it). The concern here is trying to understand why people may fail to help in emergency situations. Two contrasting accounts are discussed in this chapter: the first is based on experimental social psychology; and the second on a feminist critique of this work.

Reading 7.1 is by John Darley and Bibb Latané. As experimental social psychologists, these researchers were keen to try to find explanations for the events of the Kitty Genovese crime that centred on the role of situational factors, and to translate these factors into experimental variables that could be tested in laboratory studies. They were not persuaded by accounts written up in newspapers of the day that argued that apathy and indifference among average New Yorkers was the reason for their non-intervention. Their own explanation centred on the idea of *diffusion of responsibility*: the responsibility to help is 'diffused' or spread across all the bystanders present, so that no one individual feels that it is up to them to do something to help. The prediction that Darley and Latané drew from this idea was that as the number of bystanders to an emergency increases, the less likely it is that any one of them will actually intervene.

**Have you ever been a bystander in an emergency situation? Can you remember what it felt like and how you came to a decision to intervene or not?**

In the experimental study described in Reading 7.1, Darley and Latané created an experimental situation in which the participant believed that he or she was witnessing a health emergency (someone experiencing a fit), and the researchers were interested in how long it took the participant to report the problem and get help. The key independent variable was the number of other people that the participant believed also heard the person having the fit. The 'bystanders' were not allowed the opportunity to discuss what was happening with each other and had to make their decisions alone about what action to take. (This made the situation similar to that of the Kitty Genovese crime where the bystanders could not tell what action others were or were not taking.) The findings were typical of much of the research in this area: 85 per



cent of the participants who thought that they alone knew of the victim's plight reported the fit, while only 31 per cent of those who thought that four other bystanders were also present did so.

Findings of this sort from experimental studies have been taken to demonstrate the importance of the number of other bystanders present in the situation. Bystanders' reluctance to intervene is seen to result not from their apathy, indifference or deficient personalities, but from particular situational forces that lead them to hesitate and rationalise inaction by thinking that 'someone else must be doing something'.

**Think back to the 'prison' study conducted by Philip Zimbardo (see DVD 1) in the same historical period as Darley and Latané's research, and to Stanley Milgram's study of obedience (discussed in Book 1, Chapter 2). Here again, the interest was in moving away from explanations for behaviour that focus on individual personality towards explanations that focus on the situational factors that could lead any of us to behave in a certain way.**

In Reading 7.2, the experimental account is subject to a feminist critique by Frances Cherry. This author argues that if we want to fully understand why people failed to come to the aid of Kitty Genovese, then we need a fuller understanding of the social and cultural context than is provided by experimental psychology. Cherry points out that Kitty Genovese and her assailant were living in a society at a time when its members did little to intervene in violence directed towards women. By stripping away this aspect of the social context from the experimental paradigm, Cherry argues that one of the most important means of understanding this situation, in terms of gender and sexual relations, together with their prevailing societal norms, has been removed from our view and replaced by a series of situational variables, such as number of bystanders.

In her own account, Cherry explores the specific details of the Kitty Genovese crime in the context of the rise of the feminist movement and her own research into sexual violence. Seen in this context, the incident takes on a quite different meaning and suggests an alternative way of understanding the events that centres on gender and power relations in society.

### **Examples of course themes**

The themes of situated knowledges and power relations are very evident in Reading 7.2. Cherry's argument challenges the assumption underlying the experimental paradigm that research can be objective and value-free and, indeed, whether it ought to be so. She argues that theory is always to some degree the product of its time and place; theories can never be 'good for all time'. The chapter ends with the argument that if we take seriously the idea of multiple interpretations, then we can no longer defend the idea that there can only be one true description of the world and the people in it, to be 'discovered' by objective observation. Instead, our knowledge as social scientists is seen as a product of the questions we have chosen to ask and of the unique interaction between our own biography, that of our participants, and the broader social and cultural context in which research takes place.



Cherry makes clear that her own interpretation of the Kitty Genovese event was shaped by her own social situation and, especially, her experiences with the women's movement.

In her feminist critique, Cherry focuses on gender and power inequalities underlying research into bystander intervention. The Kitty Genovese crime is seen, first, within the framework of gender relations; and, second, within a larger framework of *multiple structures of powerlessness* (for example, poverty, 'race' and class) that affects our daily lives. Cherry points out that some groups or communities are more vulnerable to violence than others and have been so historically. It is argued that we should look at how understanding and experience are structured by the material conditions of poverty and systematic exclusion from power. Intervening or turning away are behaviours best understood in historical and cultural context. Cherry argues that it is the task of social psychology to theorise a socio-politics of intervention, starting with increased knowledge of the long and complex history of non-intervention in instances of violence against powerless groups – women, the aged, children, racial minorities and the poor, among others.

### Key concepts

culturally embedded theorising	powerlessness	standpoint epistemology
diffusion of responsibility	reflexivity	
feminist critique	social constructionist epistemology	

## 7.2 Book 1, Chapter 7, 'Embodiment'

### What will I learn from this chapter?

In this chapter, Linda Finlay and Darren Langdridge consider the connections between an individual's body, identity and the social world. An important theme in the chapter is the argument that we should move beyond the binaries that have dominated debates in this area, specifically, the *mind-body dualism* (or *Cartesian dualism*), which treats the body as an object separate from the mind. There are important connections here with Wendy Hollway's discussion of the binaries that have dominated theorising on the self (see Book 1, Chapter 5).

In the first part of this chapter, Finlay and Langdridge discuss the idea of the body as an '*identity project*', whereby people may use their bodies to express a particular identity and pursue a particular lifestyle. Fashion and physical exercise are good examples, where the body is used to express our individuality and aspirations as well as our group affiliations. The extent to which such expressions are really *individual choices* or responses to *societal pressures* is a key question here.



**Think about your own ideas about 'healthy bodies', 'looking good' and 'keeping fit'. What do you know about the role of 'healthy eating', for example? Where does this knowledge come from? How is your own diet and lifestyle affected by this knowledge?**

The rest of Chapter 7 is devoted to two contrasting perspectives on embodiment: discursive psychological and phenomenological.

Discursive psychologists argue that body projects reflect the pervasive influence of society. They are social practices constrained by the ideals, meanings and identities available in culture. Our bodies are discursive in the sense that they both reflect and express cultural meanings, ideals and ideologies. 'Free' choices are not as free as they may seem. Finlay and Langdridge make clear that the discursive approach to the body discussed in this chapter is derived from the work of Michel Foucault. While some discourse analysts would make a distinction between what is material and what is discursive, Foucault argued that the material world is *only* made meaningful through discourse. To put it bluntly, there is nothing meaningful outside discourse. What passes for truth about the body is only the knowledge that has been accepted in society (though, naturally, this knowledge can be contested).

**From your reading of Chapter 7, what is Foucault's approach to the relationship between knowledge, power and discourse?**

Foucault has a special interest in the ways in which power and knowledge are intertwined. He critiques the ways that, within modern societies, people are controlled and disciplined through the language and practices of sciences (namely, measuring, examining, analysing). Foucault sees the sciences as establishing standards of 'normality' that become discourses that people 'soak up' unknowingly. In the context of embodiment, we learn as members of our society to use a distinct language of description and explanation where aspects of our bodies are measured and classified (normal/abnormal, healthy/unhealthy, fat/thin, etc.) Foucault encourages us to consider the *power relations* that underlie discourses, the ways in which people participate in these power relations, the *interests* served by specific discourses, and the ways in which people may resist discourses. A number of examples relating to health and illness and to sexuality are given to illustrate the arguments. (There are important connections here with the discussion in Reading 8.2, Book 2, Chapter 8 concerning the ways in which psychological characteristics, such as personality traits, are also subject to classification and measurement by 'experts'.)

**Finlay and Langdridge discuss the example of gender and eating disorders. How does this example illustrate the interplay of discourse, power and resistance?**

Chapter 7 then moves on to consider a phenomenological approach to embodiment. Writers here take issue with what they see as the sidelining of bodily experience, and argue for a level of experience that is not encompassed by discourse. They focus on people's lived experience,



meanings and consciousness and, thus, in the present context, on how bodies are experienced. Two key ideas are highlighted:

- Consciousness of the body: Distinctions are drawn between *subjective body* (the lived body that fluidly and pre-reflectively engages with the world); *objective body* (the body as an object that is observed by self and others); and *bodily self-consciousness* (when the person becomes aware of the gaze of another person).
- A body–world interconnection: A distinction is drawn between *corporeal things* and the *body*. The corporeal thing is bounded by the skin whereas our sense of embodied selfhood may extend beyond this limit.

These points lead to some discussion about the merging of the body and the world. Examples are given of the experience of pregnancy and the experience of illness, in this case, having multiple sclerosis (MS). (You will find Finlay's phenomenological research on embodiment discussed on DVD 1 as well.)

**How do the discursive and phenomenological perspectives compare in their approaches to embodiment? Is it possible to develop an approach that brings together the emphases on discourse and experience? Are there areas of fundamental disagreement?**

### Examples of course themes

The theme of agency–structure is particularly relevant to the notion of the body as an 'identity project'. The fact that we can choose to present ourselves in certain ways (in western culture at least) suggests that our identity is not entirely fixed or determined by our bodies. We can choose to change our bodies through surgery, dieting, drugs and exercise, for example. People may therefore feel that they have a degree of choice or agency to create alternative identities through body projects (see the example of Loren Cameron in Chapter 7, Section 2). Of course, the degree to which we are actually expressing 'free choices' or responding to societal pressures of various sorts is a matter for debate.

The theme of power relations comes into the chapter in a number of places, especially in the ways in which distinct aspects of embodiment are more highly valued in our western society, reflecting underlying power relations. Feminists have been concerned with the ways in which women's bodies have been subject to particular pressures, such as the 'tyranny of slenderness'. Ethnic identity is another example, illustrated in Chapter 7, Section 2 through 'Michael Jackson's Body Project'. Body projects may reflect specific cultural meanings and power inequalities rather than reflecting 'free choices'.

The work of Foucault, which is discussed in Chapter 7, Section 3, makes a strong connection between power and knowledge. The production of scientific knowledge is seen as establishing standards of 'normality', which become discourses taken up in everyday life and affect the choices that people make. Societies control and discipline people through the language and practices of the sciences, notably measurement and classification. There is discussion here of the ways in which people may take up these powerful



discourses and comply with them, but may also, on occasion, resist discourses, taking us back to the theme of agency–structure.

### Key concepts

being-in-the-world	chiasm	mind–body dualism
bodiliness	corporeal feminism	objective body
bodily consciousness	disciplinary technologies	queer theory
bodily self-consciousness	the docile body	subjective body
body–world interconnection	existential-phenomenological method	transgenderism
Cartesian dualism	flesh	

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## 7.3 Book 2, Chapter 8, ‘Individual differences’

### What will I learn from this chapter?

In Chapter 8, Trevor Butt considers various approaches to personality, some of which contrast with our everyday commonsense understanding of the term.

**Think about how you understand the term ‘personality’. Write a short description of your own personality and that of a close friend’s. Do you think he or she would agree with your descriptions? If not, how can we decide who is right (perhaps there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ account)?**

Butt explains that theories of personality emerged from three separate academic traditions: clinical, psychometric and experimental. These different traditions influenced the sorts of theories developed as well as the methods of research used. Butt focuses on a very popular approach to personality, *trait theory*, which has flourished particularly in the context of psychometric assessment. Traits are defined as relatively enduring ways in which one individual differs from another. One of the strengths of this approach is that it clearly relates to the ways in which people assess each other’s personalities in everyday life and use these assessments to explain why people react differently in what appears to be a similar situation. (Critics of trait theory have argued that this approach provides little more than a description of the behaviour, for example ‘explaining’ aggressive behaviour by saying that someone *is* aggressive.)

Reading 8.1 is by Hans Eysenck and Stanley J. Rachman, who link their account of personality traits to underlying physiological factors (and thereby go beyond the description of behaviour to posit causal mechanisms). They argue for the overriding significance of two personality dimensions: extraversion/introversion and neuroticism/stability. According to Eysenck and Rachman, these two dimensions are grounded in differences in cortical and



autonomic arousal respectively, and they have conducted a number of experimental studies to test these links. Eysenck's and Rachman's case is that theirs is a scientific approach to personality that can be used to predict how a person is likely to react in a certain situation. They refer to various questionnaires that have been designed to measure extraversion and introversion, including the *Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI)*. Using scales such as this, it is possible to compare the scores of different individuals and groups of individuals (see Figure 2 in Reading 8.1).

**Have a look at Eysenck's and Rachman's descriptions of a 'typical extravert' and a 'typical introvert'. (They point out that few people closely resemble these extremes and that most people fall somewhere in the middle on the scale.) How well do these descriptions fit with our everyday usage of these terms?**

While trait theory appeals to our intuitive sense that people respond differently in the same situation (and that people show some consistency across different situations), there are a number of problems with this approach. The claim of a consistent and stable personality structure rests on the assumption that this represents the organisation of attributes *in the person being rated*. There is evidence that this assumption is not justified. Perceptions of personality may tell us more *about the people doing the rating*, who draw on culturally shared trait theories to frame their perceptions, than about the person being rated. Like beauty then, traits can be seen to be in the eye of the beholder. The traits that we use and the ways in which they are seen to 'go together' in specific individuals may be a reflection of our world view and of our society and culture, rather than a reflection of some psychological reality in the person we are rating. According to this view then, personality traits are not waiting to be 'discovered' in the ratee, but constructed by the rater in the same way that we have argued that other aspects of psychological knowledge are constructed by the person doing the theorising. Research into personality tells us something about the way in which we perceive people, and not about the existence of a trait structure that is responsible for behaviour.

This argument underlies Reading 8.2, by Phillida Salmon, which is based on George Kelly's *personal construct theory*. Kelly has a very different approach to the study of personality from that of Eysenck and Rachman and other trait theorists. Some personal construct theorists, including Butt, understand personal construct theory as a form of phenomenological psychology, in which each person is seen as developing a system of personal constructions of the world based on individual experience. Individual differences here are about appreciating different world views. In common with other strands of phenomenological work, there is an emphasis on *lived experience*, *personal meanings* and an attempt to capture the *richness of each individual*.

In Reading 8.2, Salmon applies this approach to the context of teaching and learning. She begins with a critique of the idea that knowledge is a standardised, externally defined entity to be transmitted from one person to another. Teaching here is seen as the simple delivery of ready-made information packages. Instead, Salmon argues for a more dynamic, constructed view of knowledge, as temporary and open to change, where



learning is the shifting of meanings within an essentially personal system of understandings. Viewed in this light, learning may involve quite a fundamental shift in the learner's world view, and this explains why change on the part of the learner may be difficult. Where our most basic sense of ourselves and our worlds seems to be at risk, we may close ourselves off to the threat involved. For some school children, to take up the language of the curriculum may entail a risk to a valued identity. Salmon argues that knowledge should never be seen as neutral but carries the interests and concerns of distinct socio-cultural groupings which may or may not coincide with the identity of the learner.

Salmon refers to a methodological technique, developed by Kelly, called the *repertory grid technique*, which is an attempt to make personal meanings more available to reflection and to help the individual to articulate their bases for action. In the study of personality, the use of repertory grids allows the researcher to explore *the perceiver's* way of understanding the social world. The author's own methodological technique is called the *Salmon Line*, and its function is to represent educational progression in the form of a single line: a line that allows the individual learner to define the personal, idiosyncratic meaning of such progression.

**Think about your own educational progression in your Open University studies. How do you think you could represent your own progression using a Salmon Line?**

This represents a very different approach to the study of individual differences. While trait theory was concerned with measurement and classification, personal construct theory attempts to capture the richness of each individual by trying to understand the particular way in which each person makes sense of his or her world. There is an emphasis on personal meanings and constructions here, on understanding rather than scientific explanation. The way in which each person interprets the world is the reason why they act as they do.

**What do you think are the main applications for these different theories of personality? Remember that trait theory has its roots in the context of psychometric testing while personal construct theory has its roots in clinical psychology and attempts by clinicians to help with individual change.**

### Examples of course themes

The theme of situated knowledges is clearly very relevant here. Our everyday understanding of personality sees the individual as a collection of traits that can be measured and classified. This is a western conception of the individual as bounded and separate from the society in which he or she is embedded, and it may contrast with conceptions of the individual in other cultures. The use of trait theory in applied settings in our western society, such as occupational and clinical settings, brings in the issue of power relations. Where personality is seen as something that can be objectively measured using the appropriate instrument (a personality inventory), power is invested in those 'experts' who have access to the tools of the trade and can measure/



classify people – and judge some people to be more ‘normal’ than others. Salmon’s discussion of the school context also points to the power relations underlying the educational system, where pupils (and teachers) are subject to classification within a hierarchy of competence.

Agency–structure is especially relevant to the discussion in this chapter around Reading 8.2 by Salmon. This author discusses the difficulties that may be involved in bringing about personal change, in this case through learning, since learning may involve some threat to our personal constructions of the world. The same argument may be made about trying to change some other aspect of behaviour, such as patterns of relating to other people.

### Key concepts

extraversion	neuroticism	repertory grid technique
Eysenck Personality Inventory	personal construct theory	Salmon Line
introversion	psychometric assessment	trait theory

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## 7.4 Study skills pointers in Block 7

The material covered in this block focuses on some important topics (bystander intervention, embodiment and individual differences), but it is also being used to make a more general argument about the production of knowledge. Make sure that you understand this argument and can use the research examples from this block to support it.

By now, you will hopefully have written and received feedback from your tutor on three essay-type assignments (TMAs 01, 02 and 04), as well as on your project proposal (TMA 03) and project itself (TMA 05). This is a good moment to go back to these assignments and look again, carefully, at the feedback. Do you feel that you are developing your skills of critical evaluation? Has your tutor suggested other things that you could do to improve these skills? Are there other points about your writing skills that you could still work on for this last assignment? The assignment itself (TMA 06) is not due until you have completed Block 8, which comprises the concluding chapters in the books.



## 8 Block 8, Conclusions

This final block covers Study Weeks 27 to 30. It includes TMA 06 in Week 30, although the reading for this assignment is contained mainly in the previous block. In Block 8 you should:

- read Book 1, Chapter 8
- read Book 2, Chapter 9
- read the rest of this *Course Guide*
- watch DVDs 1 and 2 again.

### 8.1 Book 1, Chapter 8, 'Conclusion: social psychology matters'

#### What will I learn from this chapter?

In Chapter 8, Wendy Hollway reviews the four interrogative themes that underlie the course. She argues that the theme of situating social psychology overarches all the other themes. The discussion illustrates the relationships between the interrogative themes and suggests that it may be helpful to view them as two pairs: power relations with situated knowledges as one pair; and individual–society dualism with agency–structure dualism as the other pair (see also Book 1, Chapter 1, where the relationships between the themes are discussed in this way).

**At this point, it would be helpful to look back over the examples of course themes given in this *Course Guide* in relation to each chapter. Looking across the chapters, what connections can you see? How do the themes relate to each other in the context of particular topics?**

At the end of Chapter 8, Hollway raises three important issues (or 'insistent questions'). The first of these relates to the need to move beyond the dualisms and to recognise both the individuality and the relationality (or sociality) of the self. The second issue concerns how we can make judgements about the quality of social psychological knowledge, or whether we should be equally sceptical about all knowledge production (sometimes referred to as *relativism*). Third, Hollway discusses the applications of social psychology and the need to bear in mind the partial and provisional nature of knowledge in this practical context.

### 8.2 Book 2, Chapter 9, 'Conclusion'

#### What will I learn from this chapter?

In this chapter, Darren Langdrige revisits the distinction between 'mainstream' and 'critical' psychology that was discussed in Book 2, Chapter 1. In his discussion, he seeks to understand why social psychology has settled



with these alternative approaches side by side, and he then considers recent attempts to create a dialogue across divisions. The discussion moves on to consider the production of knowledge more generally and the ways in which psychology and the socio-political realm are inextricably intertwined.

## Part 3 Revision and the DD307 exam

Now that you have finished all of the course materials, you will be at the stage of looking back to integrate the material you have covered and looking ahead to revision and the exam. This final part of the *Course Guide* starts with some advice about general revision strategies and then considers the specific revision strategies that may be useful for DD307. It concludes with some advice for tackling the end of course exam.

### 1 General revision strategies

Now that you are nearly at the end of the course, your thoughts will be turning to revision and the exam. How should you revise? To begin with, you obviously need to refresh your memory of what is in the course. You may be tempted to revise chapter by chapter, working steadily through the course. However, a far better strategy is to work in a hierarchical way if you can, beginning with an overview of the whole course, then an overview of each block and each perspective, actively reviewing what you know at each stage, before going on to work on the details.

When going through the material for revision, a good approach is to think of each chapter of the course material in terms of the following:

- What are the core questions with which this chapter deals?
- What role do the course themes and perspectives play in this chapter?
- What links are there with other parts of the course?

If you have followed the advice of the *Course Guide* as the course progressed, you will already have a lot of relevant notes to provide the basis for your revision. (If not, this is the moment to make them!) These notes may include a summary of the key points in a chapter, and the connections with other parts of the course and with the course themes and perspectives.

*Active learning* is without doubt the most effective way of understanding and digesting the material on the course. This means *asking* and *answering questions* of the material you review and *reformulating ideas in your own words*. In this way, the ideas will be assimilated into your own construct system well enough for you to be able to use them in the particular ways that may be required by certain exam questions. The DD307 exam requires you to do more than merely recall a subject well enough to be able to write a descriptive essay about it. As you know from Part 1, Section 4 of this *Course Guide*, the emphasis is very much on *analysis* rather than description. This



means that it is not sufficient just to write *about* the topic of an exam question. You will also be expected to apply the knowledge you have to the way the question is angled.

There are two key structuring devices (perspectives and themes) for active revision of the material in DD307 and we will first suggest some ways to make use of these devices in your revision. We will then turn to some other revision strategies, such as reviewing topics and key concepts, exploring dualisms, posing questions, and using the DVDs and other course materials.

## 2 Revising DD307 course perspectives and themes

- List and briefly describe from memory each of the four main perspectives in the course and their key features. You might also want to include some examples of studies or key ideas that illustrate each perspective.
- Return to the table that you started in Block 3 with examples of research (see Table 3.1 in Part 2, Section 3.4 of this *Course Guide*) and develop it more fully.
- Your project work will have given you special insight into one of the qualitative perspectives in the course: discursive psychological, phenomenological or social psychoanalytic. Go back to your project report and pull out some ideas and reflections concerning this perspective and its usefulness.
- Return to Table 2.1 in Book 1, Chapter 2 (and see DVD 1), where the perspectives are compared. Add some further detail of your own to the contents of the table.
- Each of the perspectives tends to make use of particular methods of research that suit its assumptions about the nature of the person and the kind of understanding that is appropriate. Make a list of the different methods that you have encountered on the course and the ways in which they have been used.
- At certain places in the course, reference has been made to variations *within* perspectives. See if you can come up with some examples that illustrate this variation.
- Describe from memory each of the four themes underlying the course. Think of the places in the course where you personally find these themes illustrated most clearly.
- There are many linkages between the course themes (see Book 1, Chapters 1 and 8). Go back through your notes and pick out some examples that illustrate the connections between different themes.



### 3 Other revision strategies on DD307

#### 3.1 Topics and key concepts

The course has not attempted a systematic analysis of all the different aspects of social behaviour, but has focused on certain key topics in contemporary debate. Different perspectives highlight different features of social behaviour and conceptualise these in their own ways. Within the broad chapter headings are a number of more specific areas of interest, and you may well want to draw on these areas as examples in your exam answers.

Make a list of some of the different social behaviours and social phenomena that are discussed in the course and think how they can be used to illustrate perspectives and themes. Here are a few examples to start you off:

- Parenting and gender relations
- Identities
- Prejudice and racism
- Crowd behaviour
- Health and illness.

Have a look at the key concepts highlighted at the end of each chapter summary in this *Course Guide*. Look these concepts up in the book indexes. Note whether there seem to be differences in the ways in which certain terms are being used by different authors (see Part 2, Section 1.1 of this *Course Guide* and the note about terminology).

#### 3.2 Exploring dualisms

There are many places in the course where authors have drawn attention to dualisms in theorising. The clearest examples of this are in the themes of individual–society dualism and agency–structure dualism, but there are other examples as well. Wendy Hollway's chapter on the self (Book 1, Chapter 5) draws attention to a number of dualisms (or binaries) in ways of thinking about the self. Make a list of the dualisms that arise in the course material and think about how it may be possible to move beyond this 'either/or' theorising. In what ways have various researchers attempted to do this?

#### 3.3 Posing questions

As part of your active revision, we would encourage you to formulate some questions of your own in relation to the content of each chapter of the books. By listing the questions that the particular material is attempting to answer or discuss, you can effectively summarise a section of the course, as well as focus on ways that you can use the material in an exam. It is also important, of course, to make some brief notes on how you might answer these questions! You may find it helpful to take each chapter of the course material and generate some questions (and answers) relating to that material.



### 3.4 Using the DVDs and other course materials

The DVDs provide a useful source of information for revision purposes. You will find brief summaries of the four perspectives on DVD 1, linked into Table 2.1 in Book 1, Chapter 2. This will provide you with a quick revision tool. Return to your notes on the research that is presented on the DVDs and think how this can be used to illustrate themes, perspectives and methods.

Remember, of course, that your TMAs, together with the feedback from your tutor and the specimen exam paper (SEP), are a vital source of information. Posing and answering questions is a much more useful way to approach your revision than simply reading through course material. It provides you with a focus and structure to your revision and gives you experience of that all-important skill of *answering the question*!

## 4 Advice for tackling the exam

So, you have done your revision. Now you have to face the exam. Sadly, too many students who have clearly worked very hard on the course material do not do themselves justice in the exam. No doubt, as a third-level student, you have already been given advice in previous years, but it may still be worth reiterating some simple guiding principles.

### 4.1 Before the exam

#### Anticipating questions

It is worth giving some thought to the kinds of questions that might come up, since part of the art of passing exams has to do with success in anticipating the *type* of question that will be asked. The SEP should help here. The course team tries to ask questions that they think are worth answering, such as questions about what they see to be the key issues and main points. You will find help with identifying these in the introductions and conclusions to the books, in the chapter headings and sections, and in the chapter summaries in Part 2 of this *Course Guide*.

It is also worth thinking about what kind of question *you* would set if you were a member of the examining board and you were trying to be rigorous and fair in assessing the depth and breadth of understanding of the course material.

#### How much detail is required?

In considering this issue, it is useful to bear in mind what is required of you in the exam. You have to plan and write three essays in three hours. This normally only gives you time to offer, at most, a short introduction that comments on the subject of the essay and your proposed treatment of it, and then you need to move on to the main part of the essay where you develop your argument. There is unlikely to be time to make more than about four to six main points, supported with appropriate illustrations and examples. This



should be followed by a necessarily brief conclusion that summarises your argument/ideas and perhaps comments on the wider implications, or places the ideas in context. The pressure of time in an exam makes it important to get down to essentials as quickly as possible, illustrated by supporting evidence.

Although the introduction to the *Assignment Booklet* gives you advice that can usefully be applied to exam answers (e.g. the need for structure and to use evidence), remember that exam answers are not the same as TMA essays. You have far less time to explore issues (let alone think about them!). It is unlikely that you will be able to write as much as 1000 words in the time you have for each question. You need to be even more to the point than with TMAs, and clearly convey the essential things you are trying to say.

### **Practice plans and answers**

In addition to giving thought to what kinds of questions may come up, time can be well spent by planning out the kinds of answers you would write, should these questions come up. You should also write out some practice answers for a few of the questions – under timed conditions and using pen and paper – to see how much you can effectively write in the time available.

Remember that revision is not just about reproducing remembered material. It is about presenting an argument and analysis based on knowledge and understanding in relation to the question set. You need to get used to presenting and working with your knowledge and ideas in precise response to different kinds of question. When working on a specific topic, therefore, you should try to think about it in different ways. Devise a plan for one question on this topic, and then find (or think up) another question on the same topic and work out a plan for that. And then another. Think about how you might answer these three different questions before going to the course material to take notes on the topic in question. Then finally, find a new, fourth question on this topic and write an answer to that question without further study.

In other words, you need to prepare yourself to cope in the heat of the exam situation with new and as yet unknown ways in which an exam question will require you to write about a topic.

It would also be a good idea at this stage to review the comments that your tutor has made on your TMAs throughout the year in order to highlight any aspects of your writing style and presentation of arguments that you may still need to address.

## **4.2 During the exam**

### **Planning is vital**

In the exam, you will need to give yourself adequate time to select carefully which options you are going to choose (perhaps allow up to 10 minutes in total). In an exam paper divided into parts, as you find in DD307, you might want to tackle and complete each part of the paper in turn. (It does not matter, of course, in which order you do these.) Alternatively, you may want to select



all three questions at the beginning of the exam so that you can note down material to use in answering each while it is still fresh in your mind.

For each question, it is vital to plan what you are going to say before you start your answer. You may want to take up to 15 minutes to do this, leaving 40–45 minutes for writing (assuming roughly an hour for each question, minus some time for your initial selection of questions). This time for planning is important. A good strategy for planning your answer is first to jot down relevant ideas and information as they come to you, and second to sort out the points into a sensible argument or sequence. Also, of course, keep a careful eye on the clock to make sure you keep to the schedule you intend.

### **Focus on the question set**

In writing your exam answers, it is vital that you *make sure that you answer the precise question set*. This is perhaps the most important guideline to exam success, and the one that is too frequently ignored. Therefore, read the question very carefully, note all of its aspects (perhaps underlining key words), and answer precisely what it asks you. You will not get many marks for just writing down all you know about a topic, or only loosely relating your knowledge to the question. Do not be sidetracked into merely repeating the answer you gave to a similar question that you tackled in the past. You will not get any marks for throwing in irrelevant material or bits of answers to other question options that you did not select.

### **Analysis and evaluation are essential**

At third level, all questions will require you to analyse and evaluate, as well as describe. Often, they will require you to construct an argument and/or look at the pros and cons of different positions. One of the most common complaints of markers is that a student has been insufficiently analytical. In other words, the answer was too descriptive. Go back to Part 1, Section 4 of this *Course Guide* where we first discussed the importance of critical analysis. Analyse the strengths, weaknesses and implications of the various theoretical perspectives and bring to bear the criticisms that theorists from the other perspectives might make.

### **Write as a social psychologist**

Your answer should draw on evidence or be supported by carefully reasoned argument. Cite research evidence carefully and critically. Show how it is relevant to the point you are making. Do not make general, vague statements unsupported by evidence or argument. Do not rely on anecdote. Social psychology touches on a great many ‘real life’ issues, but questions should not be answered in general terms without making reference to course or research material. You should use the ideas and research material contained within the course as the basis for your answers.

### **Quality of organisation**

Concentrate on presenting a clear argument that your marker can follow. A common fault in answers is that the ‘flow of ideas’ in the answer isn’t obvious.



The purpose of an exam answer at this level of study is nearly always to argue a case. It is not simply to show that you have remembered the course material by referring to parts of it.

### Writing style

Clarity of writing is essential if you want to get good marks. Your answers should be easy to read. Ensure as far as you can that your ideas are in a logical sequence, flowing on from one to another. Use paragraphing to signal the termination of one major point and the start of the next. Generally, a good strategy is to keep your sentences relatively short. Ensure that your writing is legible. Strictly speaking, you will not be penalised for poor legibility but, in reality, if the examiner cannot clearly read all you say, he or she may not be able to credit you as fully as you deserve. Remember that you are communicating to a reader. Try to express yourself as clearly as you can.

### Be concise

Do not waste precious time on waffle or on writing around an issue. It is better to spend the time thinking of a few quality points that answer the question. Some of the best answers can be relatively brief. There is no need to write out the question at the beginning of an answer (unless you specifically choose to do this in order to focus your mind on the question). Of course, though, you should write the question number accurately and clearly so that the marker knows which question you are answering.

#### Some typical things that students do wrong

The following are drawn from examiners' reports:

- *Misallocation of time* so that the third question is rushed or omitted. Bear in mind that each question is allocated a third of the marks and that most marks are likely to be gained in the first 30 minutes or so of writing on each question.
- *Failure to answer the question set*, misreading or misinterpreting the question, writing 'all I know about...' Cases have been noted of students remembering and using model answers that they have prepared during their revision without any attempt to adapt them to the particular questions set. However good these may be in themselves, such answers will not get good marks.
- *Failure to illustrate and support arguments* sufficiently. For example, lack of reference to specific psychologists, theories and research.
- *Poorly presented answers*. For instance, lack of planning leading to weakly structured, disorganised answers and lack of conclusions.
- *Writing illegibly*.

It is disheartening for an examiner to find students disadvantaging themselves in these basic ways, especially if it also appears that they have a good understanding of the course material. Please don't upset *your* examiners in this way!



## 5 A last word

To conclude, it might be worth pointing out that taking DD307 is not just about taking an exam and getting a good grade. Whatever your final grade, we hope that studying this social psychology course has enriched your understanding of social life and the behaviour and experience of yourself and others; and that it has given you a heightened appreciation of the kinds of understanding possible (and not possible) in an area such as this. We also hope that, for some of you, this will mark not the end but the basis of further engagement with the study of self and others.



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